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CHIQUITA



"Chiquita was lifted up by two powerful arms, taken into the waiting automobile, and rushed out of the city before she had time to realize what had happened to her."—

Page 49

CHIQUITA AND A MOTHER'S HEART

(TWO STORIES)

By
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*Author of "Her Heart's Desire," "The Adventures of
Four Young Americans," "Nellie Kelly," "Ronald's
Mission," "The Little Ambassadors," etc.*



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This interesting story appeared in the "Young Catholic Messenger" some years ago, and was so successful that the author consented to have it brought out in book form.

Chiquita

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A Mother's Heart

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Chiquita

I

MOTHERLESS

“SISTER, I know how anxious you always are to help God’s forsaken little ones, so I am going to ask you to take charge of this poor, motherless child,” said kind Father Harris, one of the Jesuit Fathers of Santa Benedicta, as he led into the Convent parlor a pale, half-starved looking little Spanish girl of about four; strikingly beautiful in spite of her ragged garments, disheveled hair, and tear-stained face.

“Certainly, Father! I will take her as sent to us by God Himself, and she will find the love of many mothers here. Won’t you come to me, dear?” added Mother Superior, in her soft, caressing voice, as she held out her arms to the little girl, who only clung more desperately to Father Harris, and hid her face on his shoulder.

“Poor baby!” he exclaimed, “I’m afraid you will find her very wild and shy, for I found her in a lonely hut, far up on the mountains, alone

with her dying mother, and she doesn't know a word of English."

"How beautiful she is! I can say it safely, as she does not understand me," said Mother Annunciata with a smile. "She does not look like the children of those poor Mexicans."

"No; her mother was a Castilian, and evidently a refined woman of good family. So much I could gather, but she was so near death when I finally reached her, that I was only just in time to give her all the last Sacraments, which she received very fervently. Afterwards, she tried very hard to explain to me something about her family, but her speech was almost gone, and with my imperfect knowledge of Spanish, all I could make out was that she was most anxious that her husband, a Spanish gentleman, should not get hold of the child. There seemed to have been some fearful tragedy in the poor young mother's life, and she had escaped here to hide with her child, I presume."

"How did you happen to discover her in time?"

"I never would have done so by myself. Some workmen, belonging to the Water Company, found the two poor creatures almost starving and did what they could for them, though they couldn't understand a word they said. It is wonderful what real charity and grandeur there is in some of those poor Irish laborers. They

could see the woman was dying, and one of them made out that she was entreating them to send for 'El Padre.' She kept calling for him, making the sign of the Cross and clasping her hands, and they understood that she was longing for the last Sacraments. So one of them lost a whole day's work and risked 'getting fired,' as he expressed it, in order to ride down a number of miles to come and fetch me. And that for a perfect stranger."

Sister's eyes were moist. "God does not allow Himself to be outdone in generosity. He will reward him a hundredfold," she said softly.

"He has already begun to do so, for we talked much, and as we rode up there together, I found out he had been leading a reckless life for many years. He is a thoroughly good fellow at heart, though, and took the opportunity of making a truly penitent confession. He has promised to keep straight, and I believe he will, for he was much impressed by this poor lonely woman's peaceful death. She entrusted her little one to me, and seemed intensely grateful when I said I would have her brought up in a convent. God was indeed merciful to the poor soul, for a little more than a quarter of an hour after I had reached her, she passed away."

While they were talking, Mother Annunciata had been smiling to the little girl; gently strok-

ing the hair back from her face and encouraging her in every way she could think of, and now, stooping over her, she held out her arms, murmuring softly in Spanish: "Come to your new mother, darling Chiquita."

At the sound of that name, the child lifted up her head and looked at the nun with an inquiring, wistful expression in her wondrously beautiful dark eyes, while a faint smile crept about the sensitive lips.

"It is strange," said Father Harris, "that you should have been inspired to call her Chiquita. That was evidently her mother's pet name for her, though she told me the child had been baptized Esperanza. For the life of me, I could not catch her family name. I don't feel at all sure she wished me to know it."

"Mamma! I want mamma!" cried the child in Spanish, as she looked appealingly up at the Mother, and then burst into tears once more.

"Don't cry, poor Chiquita; your mama is in the beautiful Heaven, with the dear Jesus. But, you shall go to her some day, if you will be good and come with me now."

The Mother's Spanish was very imperfect, but the child understood the promise, and very unwillingly let go of her first kind friend and allowed herself to be taken into the nun's arms. Almost immediately, however, she stretched out

her hands towards Father Harris again, screaming to go back to him.

“She is so frightened, just like some poor little caged bird, isn’t she?” he said pityingly. “I had all the trouble in the world to get her away from her dead mother. It was the most pathetic thing I ever saw.” Then he added firmly in Spanish: “I must go now, Chiquita, but I will come back soon, very soon, if you are good with Mother,” and so saying, he hurried out of the room, leaving her to the kind nuns, who did all in their power to soothe and comfort her.

By dint of infinite patience, they managed to bathe her, comb out her beautiful, curly, dark hair, which hung in masses about her shoulders, and dressed her in a clean but simple little pink frock, in which she looked as pretty as a picture. When dinner time came, they led her into the refectory and sat her between two Spanish-speaking pupils, to whom they granted the privilege of talking with her during the meal. This permission was certainly not abused, for the little newcomer was too scared at the sight of so many strange faces, to answer a single word. She had for many months been living in complete solitude with her mother, her only other companions being the squirrels and other wild creatures of the woods, and her great, soft, dark eyes looked around her with terror, like some poor wounded

deer at bay. The other boarders were wild with excitement and admiration for the little one, whom they thought the most beautiful baby child they had ever seen.

"She's so beautiful, she's like pictures of the Infant Jesus, isn't she, Sister?" exclaimed one of the older girls.

"Yes, she is certainly a picture of a child," said the Sister almost sadly, as she gazed at her exquisitely chiselled features, her beautiful rosy lips, the delicate carnation on her cheeks toning perfectly with her clear olive complexion and dark hair. Then her eyes! Were there ever such great, lustrous, speaking eyes as this poor little waif's? Eyes that seemed to tell of all the passion, and longing of her sensitive child's soul, and which moved you as strangely in spite of yourself. She was beautiful even when she cried, a rare thing with the very loveliest, and when a faint smile lit up her mobile face, it seemed as if one were looking at some exquisite vision of a child saint.

"I trust she may never have to go out into the world," added Sister Aloysia, anxiously; "that wondrous beauty of hers might lead her into endless trouble, poor child. Mind you don't speak to her about it even now, Genevieve, for she is quite old enough to become vain."

"Well, but she doesn't understand a word we

say, Sister, so we couldn't make her vain, yet a while."

"She may not understand your words," said Sister with a smile, "but she understands your looks and exclamations of admiration, I feel sure, though her sorrow about her mother is too great, for her to care about anything else today, poor wee mite."

It was an intense relief to the nervous child when evening came, and a kind Sister took her up to the dormitory, before any of the others, and tucked her up safely in a cosy little white bed with curtains, that shielded her from the gaze of all those terrifying strangers. All the events of the last two days had excited her too much, for her to be able to sleep, however, and now that she no longer felt so frightened, the longing for her mother came upon her worse than ever, and for hours the Sister in charge heard her sobbing broken-heartedly. In vain, she went again and again, to try and comfort her; in vain, she fetched dear Mother Superior, to try her soothing powers; nothing could calm the little one. The kind nuns became quite anxious, for she had cried herself into a state of feverish excitement, and her cries for "Mama, Mama!" were pitiful to hear.

At last, one of the music teachers, a young novice, who had been a member of a large family

and had sung many a restless baby brother or sister to sleep, bethought herself of this remedy, and asked Mother Superior's permission to sing something. This was readily granted, and in her full, rich voice, the young nun began the "Ave Maris Stella." Almost instantly the child stopped crying, fixed her lustrous dark eyes on the singer with a look of joy, and gradually grew calmer and calmer as the singing proceeded. At last, she fell peacefully to sleep, with her little thin hand in that of the young novice.

The Sisters had now found a way to little Chiquita's heart and confidence. That way was music, which the child loved passionately, and which made a wonderful impression on her sensitive nature. With it, one might soothe or excite her, make her joyful as a little bird or sad unto tears, and, as Mother Superior looked at the lovely child sleeping so peacefully on her little white bed that night, she thought with dread, of all that life might have in store for one at once so gifted and so impressionable, and she almost wished God would take her, to join her dear mother, while she was still a sweetly innocent little child.

II

IN HER PEACEFUL CONVENT HOME

THE taming of "our little wild bird," as Father Harris called Chiquita, took some time; for everything was so new and strange to the little one, and the confinement of city life was very trying to a child, who had been used to roaming at will in the woods. Besides this, the fact of her only knowing a foreign language, of course, made things harder for her at first, and for several weeks she was constantly crying and beseeching her friends, to take her back to her "carita Madre." Little by little, however, the love and kindness that were showered on her, won her heart; the smile came back to her rosy lips, and she would go about singing snatches of Spanish songs in her wonderfully clear, silvery, child's voice. She proved to be very intelligent, and soon learned to speak English as well as any little American girl. Much younger than any of the other boarders, younger even than the day scholars, she soon became the pet and plaything of the whole school. Bright, vivacious, warm-hearted, her rippling laughter was contagious,

and she was like a ray of sunshine in the quiet convent. In vain, the Mother and Sisters tried to have her called Esperanza; to every one from the very first she was Chiquita, "little one," and the name stuck to her as long as she remained at the convent.

But winsome and lovable as she was, Chiquita had many faults. Sensitive and proud, she was passionate, even rebellious at times, and she had an inordinate love of praise and admiration. She needed the most gentle and tactful management, for she resented the very slightest injustice; and, if reproved, would have fits of sorrow or remorse almost amounting to despair. Everything about her seemed extreme. If not merry as a bird, she would be deeply despondent; if she loved, it was with passionate devotion; if she disliked, it was vehemently. She would have fits of deeply earnest piety, then again at times she seemed utterly indifferent to everything. As for music, it exercised over her a strange fascination, and would move her to joy and sorrow, or strange restlessness and excitement.

From quite a baby-child, she had a wonderfully keen ear and sweet voice; and as the years passed, these gifts did but increase; and the music teachers could not resist the temptation of making her sing solos, at their entertainments and church festivals, so that she was soon known

in the whole city as the child prodigy of the convent. In spite of the Sisters' efforts, many echoes of the lavish praise and admiration bestowed upon her, reached her ears through her admiring friends among the day scholars, and filled her foolish little heart with joy and pride.

The person of all others, whom she loved and revered and who had most influence over her was Father Harris. A word of praise, or encouragement, from him made her happy for whole days; while, if he reproved her ever so gently, her sorrow was quite pitiful. If in one of her passionate or rebellious moods, a threat to tell Father Harris, or a reminder that he would be grieved to hear of her bad behavior, would subdue her in a minute, and she would then make every effort to conquer herself. Yet, though he was deeply interested in her, the young priest was careful, from the first, not to show any preference for his little protégé. Deeply loved by all who knew him, he was, however, so ascetic and spiritual that no one, however often they saw him, could ever forget his saintly priesthood, or think of him as an ordinary human being. He was always kind, deeply, truly kind, and could be very friendly and sympathetic; yet there was an atmosphere of saintliness about him, which made one feel that he was one of God's anointed ones, to be revered as well as loved.

After Father Harris, Chiquita loved Mother Annunciata, the nun who had first received her, and who was Superioress of the Convent; and Sister Frances, a gifted musician, whose artistic temperament helped her to understand the little foreigner's over-sensitive nature. She had also many friendships among the girls of the school, and besides her love of music she had a passionate love of birds, flowers, and all the beauties of nature. Then, when she grew a little older, her love of dress and finery began to show itself. The Sisters gave her little opportunity for indulging her vanity; but she had the knack of placing a flower or a bow in the most becoming manner, and looked charming in the very simplest things. Her comrades, by their petting and admiration, encouraged the little girl's vanity; and the Sisters were often sadly anxious, when they thought of the dangers life might have in store for their little favorite; and did all in their power to train her in such deeply religious ideas, that she would have strength to conquer her temptations.

When she was ten years old she was allowed to make her first Holy Communion. Father Harris himself prepared the class that year, and Chiquita profited so well by his instructions that there was a marked change in her, and her fervor and piety filled the Sisters with joy. She had

a very special devotion to Our Lady, and was never happier than when allowed to decorate her blessed Mother's Altar, or carry her banner in the procession. But her greatest devotion of all was to the Blessed Sacrament, and even the nuns did not seem to be able to realize with greater intensity or reverence our dear Lord's presence in the Blessed Sacrament. So, in the peaceful life of the convent, Chiquita was helped to struggle against her faults, and grew in the love of God; and on the whole she was a very happy and lovable little girl.

She had made her first Holy Communion on the Feast of Corpus Christi, and that same year she was allowed to help decorate the Chapel, and make the Crib for Christmas. All this was a labor of love for her, but what filled her with still greater delight was, that she was allowed at the Midnight Mass, not only to take a solo in the "Adeste Fidelis," but to sing as an offertory the beautiful hymn "Hail! Holy Night." As she stood at the front of the organ loft with her white veil framing her beautiful face, so earnest in its heartfelt devotion, she looked like some young virgin saint in ecstasy, and her exquisite voice rang out rich and pure in the little convent Chapel, and moved many people to tears. It seemed as if one of the Angels from Heaven had

come down, to sing the praises of the Child Jesus and call souls to love and praise Him.

Parents of pupils and benefactors of the convent were allowed to assist at this Midnight Mass, and among those present was a rich maiden lady, a prominent member of society, but a lukewarm Catholic. Together with many others, she had instinctively turned round to look at the singer, and she was seized with admiration and love for the beautiful little girl. She was wealthy and lonely, why shouldn't she adopt this gifted child? What an attraction she would be at her receptions, this child prodigy! Miss Windlam could think of nothing else as the Mass proceeded, and was still more struck with Chiquita when, with clasped hands and rapt expression, the child passed her, as she followed her companions to the altar rails and back. Not only was her voice angelic, thought the wealthy lady, but she was angelically beautiful, even in her present plain clothes. What would it be, when she had dressed her up in silk and satin according to the latest fashion!

But Miss Windlam was not the only one to be struck with the little singer that night. Some enthusiastic admirer put a high-flown account of her, and of her vocal powers, in the paper the next day with the heading: "An angel fills convent chapel with floods of melody on Christ-

mas night." In spite of the fact that the Sisters strictly forbade any newspapers to be brought into the convent without their sanction, one of the day boarders managed to smuggle one in, and showed this notice to Chiquita. At first she refused to read it, but the temptation was too great, and she was punished for yielding to it, by losing the joy and peace of mind which had been hers ever since her First Communion, and feeling once more in a whirl of excited vanity and foolish day dreams of future greatness.

On Christmas day, Miss Windlam came to call on Mother Annunciata, and began by making her a generous donation for the convent; then she burst out in extravagant praise of Chiquita's beauty and exquisite singing, and tried to question the Mother on the child's parentage and prospects. Finding that she could obtain but little information from the Superior, who constantly tried to turn the conversation, she finally spoke of her desire to adopt the child, and bring her up in every luxury as her own daughter. To her intense surprise, so far from joyfully accepting the offer, Mother Annunciata answered gravely, that the child had been entrusted to their care by a friend, and that she had neither the power nor wish to give her up. Miss Windlam was not used to having her wishes thwarted, and tried all her powers of eloquence and persuasion

to make Reverend Mother change her mind. Finding it almost impossible to get rid of her troublesome visitor, the Superior finally promised to think over the matter, and consult the child's guardian.

It happened that Father Harris was absent for the next few days, and while awaiting his return, Mother Annunciata gave orders that Chiquita should not be allowed to practice any more solos for the present, and the child, who had been looking forward eagerly to having more triumphs on the Feasts of the Circumcision and Epiphany, was intensely disappointed. She would not have felt it so much a few weeks ago, though it had always been a great joy to her to sing, but since she'd seen that flattering notice in the paper, her childish head was full of dreams of success and grandeur. To make matters worse, Miss Windlam had made no secret of her wishes or her interview with the Reverend Mother, of which a very false account was soon spread about the town, and, through one of the day pupils, reached Chiquita's ears.

The child was furious against the kind Superior, accusing her not only of wishing to prevent her from singing God's praises, but of trying to keep her in poverty and obscurity all her life, when she might be wealthy and happy, and have every opportunity of shining in the world. When

Mother Annunciata tried to gently reason with her, she so far forgot herself as to burst into passionate reproaches and accusations, and finished by saying that if she is not allowed to sing, she would run away, and go to Miss Windlam. The kind nun was deeply distressed and hurt, but she answered quietly that the decision did not lie with her, but with Father Harris, and that, if she had answered as she did, it was because she had never dreamed that Chiquita would be ungrateful enough to wish to leave her loving mothers for a total stranger. The child felt the justice of the reproof and became more subdued, though still very tearful and morose.

At last, to the Sisters' intense relief, Father Harris returned, and they were able to tell him the whole affair and speak of their ever-growing anxiety as to Chiquita's future. He was almost as disturbed as they had been, and quite determined not to give the child into the keeping of such a worldly and unreliable woman as Miss Windlam, but as to the child's singing he thought it would be unwise to put a stop to it altogether.

"It is evidently a great and wonderful gift which God had given her," he said solemnly, "and I do not think we should insist on the child's putting her talent in a napkin and hiding it away. I admit it is a dangerous gift, but

music is in her nature, and you could no more stop it in her than you could check the flow of a mighty river or prevent a lark from singing. All we can do is to endeavor to make the child feel that her voice is no merit of hers, nothing she need be vain about, but a precious talent which she should employ for God's glory, and of which He will ask her a very strict account. I know for a fact that a man who had not been to the Sacraments for years, was so touched by her singing and her devotion on Christmas night, that he went to confession the very next morning. She can therefore make it a great weapon for good. Let me speak to her, Mother, and I think I will be able to make her feel how badly she has behaved to you, and how careful she must be against giving way to vanity."

Father Harris had a long interview with Chiquita, and spoke to her more severely than he ever had done before. He began by upbraiding her with her vanity and ingratitude to the good Sisters, and especially to Mother Annunciata, whose heart she had so wounded by her heartless words, after all the devoted love and care which had been bestowed on her for over six years.

"If it had not been for Mother's kindness, you, a poor little homeless waif, would have had to be sent to some orphanage, to be brought up on public charity. Here you have had every ad-

vantage of education and training; you have been petted and shielded from every humiliation, and this is your return for six years of devoted love. You wish to leave all your friends to go and live with a rich woman you know nothing about, and whose chief desire is to make use of you to attract people to her social affairs. Go then, if you so wish it," he added, rising as if to leave the room. "Go—but we will wash our hands of you forever. We love our Chiquita, but we will have no wish ever to see the amateur performer, Miss Esperanza Windlam."

"Oh! Father, Father! Forgive me!" sobbed Chiquita, falling on her knees and stretching her hands imploringly towards him. "I see now how wicked I have been. Oh! do not cast me away; let me be your little Chiquita again, and I promise I will never be so wicked or rebellious again. I will beg Mother to forgive me; I will never sing again if you wish it."

"No, I do not wish it. Get up, Chiquita," he added more gently, "and I will forgive you this time, and pray to God to forgive you your sinful conduct of the past three days. Now sit down, I want to talk to you, not as to a baby, but to a big girl, old enough to feel and understand what I have to say."

Then gently, earnestly, he spoke to her of this great gift she had received from God, not through

the slightest merit of her own, but simply through His loving kindness. He showed her what great good she might do if she used it only for His glory, and remembered to take none of the credit of it to herself; and how she would forfeit her peace of mind and conscience, and finally lose her soul, if she allowed herself to give way to pride and love of the pleasures and vanities of the world. He decided that her singing of solos should always be a reward of good behavior, and that in punishment for her bad behavior that week, she should not sing at all for a month.

After the Father had gone, Chiquita sought out Mother Annunciata, and with bitter tears and passionate expressions of love and repentance, entreated her to forgive and forget her ungrateful conduct.

"I forgive you fully, my Chiquita," said the Superior gently, "but I will find it difficult to forget the way you spoke to me the other day. You wounded me to the heart, so deeply, that my sorrow and anxiety about you have caused me to shed many bitter tears before the Blessed Sacrament."

Chiquita wept more bitterly than ever, broken-hearted, to think how gravely she had pained the dear Mother she deeply loved; and she so begged and entreated, that at last she made her promise to try and forget her unjust, ungrateful words.

III

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS

CHIQUITA had been very truly penitent for her outburst of naughtiness, and she tried to make amends for it by being particularly obedient and docile during the next few months. She missed no opportunity of showing her affection and gratitude to the Sisters, especially to Mother Annunciata, and she was more than ever devout to the Blessed Sacrament and to Our Lady. She earnestly strove to conquer her love of admiration, and to prepare herself worthily for the reception of Confirmation which the Bishop would administer in the early spring. As a reward for her good behavior she was allowed to sing solos again, and on Easter Sunday her soul was so full of happiness that it seemed to vibrate in her every note and to fill the hearts of her listeners. So things had been going more and more smoothly and happily for more than a year, and the Sisters were full of thankfulness about her, when as unexpectedly as a clap of thunder in a clear sky came the news that Father Harris had been ordered off to another mission. Not only the

Nuns, but the whole congregation of St. Benedicta knew this to be a terrible loss, and the good Father himself felt the parting very bitterly, though he was, by far, too devoted to God's duties to think of murmuring or objecting. Wherever God called him he was willing to go, however distasteful it might be to him.

As for Chiquita, she was simply wild with grief, and prayed unceasingly that something might happen to prevent her beloved director and friend from being taken from her. When, a few days later, Father Harris came to say good-bye to the Sisters and children in whom he had taken an interest, he was quite distressed to see Chiquita's pale, tear-stained face and the look of despairing sorrow in her dark eyes.

"Chiquita," he said kindly, taking her little cold hand in his, "you must not grieve like this, but remember that God is calling me to a great work for souls, and help me all you can by your prayers. Promise me, dear child, that you will persevere in your efforts to be good, that you will be faithful to your religious duties and to your love for the Blessed Sacrament."

"Oh!" moaned Chiquita in a low, despairing voice, "I shall never be able to be good without you to help me! I feel so wild, so bad at times, no one but *you* knows how to make me better."

"Nonsense, child, any priest could guide you

just as well as I've been able to do. Remember, too, that I shall be praying for you every day of my life, and I will write to you often, very often, and do all in my power to help you. Then, you will have dear, kind Mother Annunciata and all the Sisters, and Father Burke, and the Father who is to take my place will take an interest in you. Besides, best of all, will you not have our dear Lord and His Blessed Mother? Is not their help worth a thousand times what mine could be?"

But Chiquita was inconsolable, and when Father Harris had gone away and she could no longer catch a glimpse of his figure, she ran sobbing upstairs, and flinging herself down on the floor of her room, utterly refused to be comforted. For days, and even weeks, the Sisters were quite anxious at her mute despair, and it was not until several months had passed that she was at all herself again. Even then she was often moody and fretful, restless and resentful to the discipline of the convent. She longed to roam abroad, to see woods and meadows, and ramble on the mountains that looked so inviting and beautiful from her window. She felt as if in prison.

Then she would remember Father Harris' desire that she should conquer herself, and a letter from him would give her renewed courage and

hope, and once more they would hear her sweet voice as she worked about the house.

Unfortunately, if Chiquita had many loving friends and admirers in the convent she had also several enemies, and among them one of the very worst kind—one of those who hide their hatred and malice under a cloak of friendship. This girl, Mazie Brown, was many years older than herself. She was a flashy, rather vulgar day-boarder, quick and intelligent, though not very studious, and she had for years been furiously jealous of Chiquita's beauty and lovely voice, and of her success in her classes. At first, Mazie had tried by every means in her power to get Chiquita into trouble by her mischief making. She had tried to set her schoolmates against her by false accounts of what she had said about them, drawing notice to her every fit of bad temper, or failure to observe the rules. In spite of her efforts, however, she had not had much success, for Chiquita was too winning on the whole and too great a favorite for anyone to wish to hear anything against her—indeed, Mazie had only succeeded in gaining for herself a reputation as a tale bearer and mischief maker. The Sisters mistrusted her, and only kept her in the school because they knew her home life to be anything but happy or helpful to her soul, and hoped to be able to influence her for good.

Finding herself unable to harm Chiquita, by depriving her of the good opinion of her friends, Mazie was base and cunning enough to determine to get her into trouble by drawing her into sinful disobedience. In order to do this, she began by flattering her constantly, pretending to have a devoted friendship for her, and confiding to her her own real or supposed troubles. Then, when she had thus obtained the sensitive child's sympathy and put her off her guard, she began to try and make her discontent with her convent life, pitying her for having to be so "mewed up," telling her of the delights of ten-cent shows, concerts, walks with boys, etc.; and though Chiquita's sense of refinement shrank from the thought of many of these things, still Mazie's talk left a certain impression on her mind. Mother Annunciata once noticed the two girls sitting together, and at the first opportunity, spoke to Chiquita and warned her to have as little as possible to do with Mazie, telling her she had good reasons for mistrusting the girl, though she did not add that she knew she was inclined to be coarse, vulgar, and lacking in truthfulness and a keen sense of honor. At first, Chiquita meant to obey the Superior's wishes, but, little by little, she allowed herself to be led into having secret meetings with Mazie. She little knew how bitterly she was to pay for this act of disobedience!

The families of some of the best day-pupils resided quite near the convent, and in order that Chiquita should not be dull, she was often allowed to spend the afternoon with one or other of these girls on a Saturday. When the house was but a few steps off, she was allowed to go alone, as the Sisters trusted her completely and did not think that any harm could possibly happen to her.

About six months after Father Harris' departure a fairly good opera company came to Santa Benedicta and gave several evening performances, and one matinee. The matinee, which was to be on Saturday afternoon, consisted of a representation of Faust, and knowing Chiquita's passionate love of music, Mazie felt that now or never was her opportunity for drawing the child into trouble. Her plan was deeply laid. She had obtained two of the cheapest seats, through a man in the employ of the theatre. The next thing was to get possession of Chiquita without the Sisters' knowledge. She knew well enough that they would never allow the child to spend the day with her, but she also knew that a little girl with whom Chiquita was often allowed to go and play, was greedy beyond words and very weak of character. She therefore arranged with her to invite Chiquita for that afternoon, but to *lend* her to Mazie, who would in return for her oblig-

ingness give her a pound of chocolates. The child was of course pledged to absolute secrecy, and warned that the Sisters would be sure to expel her if they discovered her share in the plot. The greedy little girl consented, and only repented after she'd eaten the chocolates, which were not very good, having been bought at the ten-cent store.

Chiquita, quite unconscious of impending danger, started off gaily for her little friend's house, and was greatly astonished to find Mazie waiting on the side-walk for her, all excitement over the delight of having arranged that they might both go to the opera together. She explained hastily that there was no harm in it, that her mother was going, too, that the Sisters need know nothing about it; and seeing Chiquita hesitate, added that this was most likely her one and only chance of ever hearing such beautiful music.

At first, the little girl honestly tried to resist the temptation, though it made her heart beat wildly with longing to hear the music. She argued that she could not be so deceitful to the Sisters who trusted her, that she had always heard theatres were dangerous, that she wouldn't go without asking permission of Mother. This did not suit Mazie at all. She stormed at Chiquita for her ingratitude and want of confidence in her; the friend who had taken such trouble and

gone to such expense to procure her this pleasure, and she exerted all her eloquence to describe the wondrous beauty of the opera, and the exquisite voices of the singers.

At last, almost against her will, Chiquita allowed herself to be dragged to Mazie's home, where she was dressed up in a big hat and veil, which very effectually disguised her, and a very short time afterwards she found herself in the gallery of the theatre where, behind the shelter of a friendly column, she could lift up her veil without any danger of being recognized.

The opera was just beginning as they entered, and in a minute the child had forgotten everything but the beauty of the overture to which she was listening. But this was nothing to her delight when the singing began. She cared nothing for the story, she didn't understand it or wish to, but she drank in the beautiful melodies with rapturous delight and, little by little, the sight of the beautiful costumes and jewels, the enthusiasm lavished upon the prima donna, the flowers thrown at her feet; all this set her soul in a very turmoil of excitement and longing to become a great singer herself, to win all this praise and admiration. Was she not beautiful? Far more beautiful than this woman in spite of her paint! Was not her voice as fine as hers, or wouldn't it be if she was properly trained?

As long as the music lasted, she was so worked up that she forgot everything else, but her intense enjoyment and her foolish dreams of vanity and grandeur, but as soon as it was over and she found herself in the street again, she realized how naughty she had been and felt utterly miserable. She hardly thanked Mazie for her treat, refused to touch any refreshment and hurried home to the convent, feeling wicked and deceitful. She pretended a headache and went to bed, fearing if she stayed downstairs she would be questioned as to how she had enjoyed her afternoon. Mother and several of the Sisters came up one after the other to see what was the matter with her, bringing her a cup of tea, and little simple remedies, but their kindness only added to her misery.

All night long she tossed restlessly in her bed; at times dreaming of theatres and jewels, and the intoxication of success and admiration; at others, remorseful and miserable, bitterly reproaching herself for having betrayed the confidence placed in her, and thinking how grieved and shocked Father Harris would be if he knew of her conduct. Oh, why wasn't he there? She felt that she could have told him of her sin in confession, but that she would not have the courage to write it to him. At last, towards morning, she resolved to take the first opportunity to con-

fess all to Mother, without mentioning who was the one she had gone with. This resolution seemed to calm her, and just as dawn was breaking she fell asleep, and did not wake until half-past eight the next morning, when one of the Sisters came to tell her to get up and dress for the nine o'clock Mass. Oh, what a bitter awakening it was! and how Chiquita wished that she could live yesterday over again!

IV

THE FOWLER'S NET

IN the stillness of the night and the first fervor of her remorse, it had seemed to Chiquita that it would be quite a simple thing to tell Mother all about her wrong-doing, and go back to her old life once more, as if nothing unusual had happened. But, when she was up and wide awake, it all took a new aspect and she felt as if her fault was too great ever to be forgiven, and its consequences too far-reaching for her to be able to struggle against them. Though only twelve years old, Chiquita was wonderfully thoughtful and clear-sighted for so young a girl, and she realized keenly that she was now entirely under Mazie's power, and that her so-called friend would most likely take a mean advantage of the fact. When she was with Mazie, she always seemed to love and admire her, but as soon as the girl was gone, she felt how deceitful and unreliable she was, and was angry with herself for having given away to her companion's influence and made a confidante of her.

She felt this more than ever this time and,

besides, it now seemed to her that she would sooner die than confess her sin to Mother Annunciata, or even to Father O'Lara, the successor of her own dear Father, who was now confessor of all the pupils at the convent. He was a very holy priest, but as severe to others as he was to himself, which was saying a great deal, and his manner, especially in the confessional, was stern and severe, and anything but helpful to so sensitive and nervous a child as Chiquita. He thought her over-petted and fancied it was good for her to be humbled and sharply rebuked for the slightest faults, whereas, far from helping her to advance, this harshness only served to discourage, frighten and antagonize her and, at this critical turning point in her life, its results were simply disastrous.

What was she to do? she asked herself in despair. She couldn't make up her mind to go to confession again, indeed the Father would refuse to hear her until the regulation hour on Saturday, and she couldn't go to Holy Communion with these great sins of disobedience and deceit on her conscience. For this day, she made an excuse about having broken her fast in the night, but she generally received her dear Lord several times a week, and she couldn't find so plausible an excuse each time. Besides, even when Saturday came, she felt she'd die sooner

than go to Father O'Lara, it seemed to make her sick and faint even to think of it.

So, that wretched day passed, she hardly knew how, and the Sisters whispered together that she had one of her restless moods on her, and prayed earnestly for their darling, little thinking of her danger. In the afternoon, while sitting by herself in the remotest part of the convent grounds, she had almost unconsciously burst out into one of the songs she had heard the prima donna sing the day before. She didn't know the words, but she knew that they were sad; and she put such pathos, such wild despair in the melody, that it brought the tears to her eyes.

All of a sudden she stopped, trembling with fright lest any of the Sisters should have heard her, and should wonder where she had learned the song. She listened with beating heart, for she could hear footsteps, and was much relieved when she ascertained that they were the steps of a man in the street, on the other side of the high wooden palings. The steps lingered though, and it was only when she had flown back to the convent like a frightened bird, that the man finally walked away.

But Chiquita had fled too late, for the listener was no other than the manager of the Operatic Company, and had been spellbound at hearing what he declared to be a voice that would send

the whole world wild with admiration. Could he get hold of the singer, train her, bring her out, his fortune was made! His present company was mediocre and he knew it, but with such a prima donna as this one would be, he could electrify the whole musical world. And he *must* get hold of her somehow, anyhow, by fair means or foul. But how was he to set about it?

The girl was in a convent, he'd seen that for himself, and, though she had been hidden from his sight, he knew by the voice that she must be quite a young girl, almost a child. He must make inquiries, but, must set about it very cautiously so as not to lose his prey, and rapidly, too, for he had to leave Santa Benedicta the next day.

All unconscious of this danger, Chiquita went to bed that night and slept heavily from utter exhaustion; but, when she awoke the next morning, it was with a miserable feeling of impending evil, and she was so inattentive in class that Sister Alberta, her teacher, spoke to her unusually sharp, and Chiquita in her overstrained state of nerves burst into a passion of angry tears.

At Mass, the preceding day, it had seemed to the child that Mazie looked at her with a mockingly triumphant air, but today, she was all honey and affection. As soon as school was out

for recreation, she drew Chiquita to a secluded part of the grounds and told her that the manager of the Opera Company had heard her sing the previous day, and was quite in raptures with the beauty of her voice, and that he was longing to see her and hear her once more, and eager to give her a ticket for the opera that night.

“He says you’ve a far more beautiful voice than that woman they all made such a fuss over yesterday, and when I told him you were a peach to look at, he was just tickled to death and said he’d give the world to see you. He’s waiting at our house now, and the Sisters won’t miss us for the next half hour. We can easily be back before the bell rings, and just think how lovely to hear the opera again tonight. Besides, you’ll get me into trouble with the manager if you don’t come, and he’ll most likely call on Mother and tell her all about Saturday.”

Chiquita felt in a very turmoil of fear, remorse, vanity and longing, and at last, on Mazie’s adding that the Sisters were *sure* to know all about their going to the theatre, and that they might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, she reluctantly allowed herself to be dragged out of the day boarders’ side entrance. Running along in the shelter of the palings, she soon found herself, she hardly knew how, standing in the Brown’s parlor before the manager.

It had so happened that the previous evening he had confided his wonderful discovery to one of his chorus singers, who was rooming at the Browns, and had heard people there talk of the child with the beautiful voice. He had questioned Mazie that evening, and finding that she not only knew Chiquita, but had her in her power, had introduced her to the manager. Together they had arranged to pay the Browns a considerable sum of money if Mazie could put them in the way of gaining possession of Chiquita, without letting any one in the town know of the adventure.

The Browns were always short of cash, besides which, Mazie was only too delighted to think of getting permanently rid of her brilliant rival; so she determined that nothing should prevent her from accomplishing her project, and was shrewd enough to demand a large sum of money for her pains. The operatic manager, Signor Altazzi, after bargaining for some time, agreed to pay this in yearly installments, to cease the very day that any of Chiquita's friends should discover her whereabouts. Thus, he secured the utmost discretion from the Brown family.

Signor Altazzi was beside himself with joy when he saw Chiquita's beauty and graceful carriage, and after gratifying her vanity to the fullest extent by praise of her voice, her loveliness,

her charming manners, he offered to take her to Europe with him, treating her as his daughter, and giving her the very best musical and theatrical education. He painted in flowery language the brilliant future that lay before her.

"You will be wealthy, and admired, and famous the world over. You will have the whole world at your feet, and be the honored guest of kings and princes who will lavish costly jewels upon you, if you only come with me, and spend a few years in studying music and developing that wonderfully beautiful voice of yours. My wife is childless and will be a mother to you, and you shall be shielded from every evil, I promise you."

The florid, stout, little man grew quite eloquent in his excitement, yet she shrank from him with a feeling of distrust and dislike, and stammered that she didn't wish to leave the Sisters.

"You'll have to leave them anyhow," put in Mazie spitefully, "for if you don't go with this gentleman, I'll tell the Sisters all about your going to the opera, and they'll expel you for sure."

"They'll expel you, too," cried Chiquita indignantly.

"What do I care? Haven't I got a home? And besides, I mean to leave next year anyhow, and there's a much jollier bunch at the high."

Chiquita shivered. The remembrance of all the difficulties that had been harassing her, came

over her in full force, and the perspective of all the wealth and pleasure and glory that were promised her was so attractive! How different to the convent, being shut in between those four walls from one week to another. Still she could not make up her mind to trust herself to this man, still less to be so deceitful with Mother and the Sisters; so she muttered that she would think over it and finally gave an unwilling promise that she would come and give her answer that afternoon, as soon as school was out. She did not exactly know how she would be able to do this, and in her heart of hearts I am not sure she even meant to keep her promise. Her greatest wish was to gain time in which to make her decision.

The two girls got back into the play-yard just as the bell was about to ring for study, but as they came in, the young Sister in charge caught sight of them and asked them rather sharply what they had been on the street for.

"Just to pick up our ball that had gone over the wall, Sister," answered Mazie boldly, as she showed one which she had just drawn out of her pocket.

"Next time it goes over you leave it there, please," said the Sister with a look of annoyance, but a few minutes after, she had forgotten all about this act of disobedience to which she

had attached but little importance. Chiquita was more than ever inattentive at her lesson, indeed the poor child's mind was in such a turmoil of fear, remorse, vanity and excitement, that she couldn't understand what she read, and the question she had to decide during the next few hours was certainly momentous enough to warrant her giving all her attention to it. Sister Alberta had a letter for her from Father Harris which had arrived that morning, but in order to punish her for her inattention she had told the child she could not have it till the evening, and so Chiquita was deprived of this timely help which might have changed the whole course of her life. Ah! if Chiquita could only have prayed! but she felt too naughty to pray, it seemed to her as if God were miles away from her troubled heart, and too angry to listen to her.

The girl watched the clock with agonized dread, grudging every minute as it slipped by and brought her nearer to the dreaded half-past three o'clock! Her heart was thumping wildly, every nerve in her body seemed to be tense and quivering with the suppressed excitement, and at last, at a quarter of three she could bear it no longer, and asking to be excused as she was not feeling well, she hastened out, determined to tell all to Mother Annunciata.

The Superior was not in her room and Chiquita

was rushing hither and thither in search of her when she met good Sister Martha, the lay Sister, who was surprised to see her out of class, and, hearing that she had been excused on account of a headache, exclaimed:

“Why, then you’re just the one I wanted. Run and get me half a pound of butter at the grocery round the corner, that’s a good child. The air will do you good and I can’t finish my pastry for want of butter.”

“I—I wanted to speak to Mother Annunciata,” stammered Chiquita anxiously.

“Well, she’s with a lady in the parlor just now, but I dare say you can see her when you come back from your errand,” answered Sister Martha cheerfully. “I’ll get a good cup of hot tea ready for you while you’re gone, and that may cure your headache. Run along now, dear.”

A minute later Chiquita found herself on the side street, which was a narrow and very quiet one. A large automobile was standing by the sidewalk only a few feet away, but in her dazed state of excitement she did not notice it. For a minute she stood undecided, wondering whether she had better go and see the manager, or, do her errand and then return home and confess everything to Mother Annunciata.

V

CAUGHT IN THE MESHES

It seemed as if everything had conspired to enable Chiquita to keep her appointment with Signor Altazzi, but now that it was so easy to do so, the child felt a terrible dread of meeting this man, and besides, she recollected the letter from Father Harris which she was to get that evening. She *could* not go without seeing that, and the very thought of him brought with it a longing to be good and at peace with God and her conscience once more. Yes, she determined she would hurry over her errand, and go back to her dear kind friends and beg forgiveness on her knees if need be. So, resolutely turning her back to the direction in which lay the manager's apartments, she was hurrying towards the grocery, when she was lifted up by two powerful arms, taken into the waiting automobile and rushed out of the city before she had time to realize what had happened to her. True, she had screamed and struggled, but the unearthly shrieks of the machine had effectually drowned her voice, and three people had held her down.

The terrible fright and emotion, coming as they did after three days of mental strain, were too much for the nervous child, and she fainted away for the first time in her life.

When she came to herself, the machine was speeding through beautiful country scenery, and a sad, gentle-faced woman was bending over her, soothing and comforting her with words of love and encouragement.

"Don't be frightened, dear child, you are with friends," she said gently, as she bathed the child's forehead with perfume and chafed her little cold hands; while the manager looked on anxiously and his secretary did his best to help the lady to restore the child.

"It was too bad to startle you so," said the manager apologetically, "but you were just like a poor little caged bird, afraid to venture out into the beautiful free world, so we had to do the best we could, you see. You'll thank us for it *some* day, when you are a famous prima donna and everyone is in admiration of your talent and beauty."

"I want to go back, I want to go home," cried Chiquita, struggling to get up.

"Not just now, it is not possible," said the lady gently, "but if you wish to do so in a few weeks, we'll see what can be done—if you're very good until then. You must try us for a time, dear."

And feeling too weak and weary to struggle any more for the present, the girl resigned herself to wait until then and allowed herself to be petted, admired, and made much of in every way. Her every whim was satisfied, everything that she desired was lavished upon her, beautiful clothes, jewels, even a pony of her own. They traveled in many lands, stayed at fine hotels, went to delightful concerts and best of all, Chiquita found in Signora Altazzi, the manager's wife, the loving care and influence of a good, refined and sympathetic woman, who shielded her from every danger of mind and soul, as carefully as she would have done for her own beloved daughter, whom she had lost a few years back.

Signora Altazzi was not too happy in her married life, and the death of her only child had left an incurable wound in her heart. She was soon passionately fond of Chiquita, or Margharita as they had re-named her, being anxious to do away with everything that could be any clue for the re-capture of the girl. The Signora had won the child's heart by telling of her loneliness and sorrow, and entreating her to love her and think of her as her mother, and she missed no opportunity for showering proofs of her affection on Chiquita, and doing all in her power to make her feel at home. The one and only thing that was denied her, was permission to go to the

Sacraments or ever to enter a church, except when accompanied by her new mother. Indeed, though it was so cleverly done that the girl hardly noticed it, she was never allowed to go anywhere by herself, but was always guarded and watched. It was not that the Signora was otherwise than a good Catholic herself, but the manager, who was a tyrant in the household, was in dread lest, if any priest *got hold of* Margharita, as he expressed it, he should induce her to leave her present friends and go back to the Sisters, and that, as he added, would never do, for he felt more and more that Chiquita was a gold mine for him. Besides, he was a free-mason himself, and his poor wife, who was in great fear of him, was never allowed to see a priest or go to the Sacraments. From the very first he had started Margharita's vocal and musical education, and found her a wondrously apt and enthusiastic pupil, and the teachers he gave her in elocution, dancing, and dramatic art, were equally charmed with her wonderful aptitude and rapid progress.

Chiquita made no further struggle to get away, she even submitted to his strict orders that she should never communicate with any of her old friends in California. But was she happy? Ah, no! In spite of all the petting and the luxuries that were lavished upon her, in spite of the praise

and admiration which she had so craved for, and of which she now had enough to turn any child's head, she was not happy. While in the whirl of the pleasures and excitement of her new life, and under the charm of the music she loved, she could forget and think she enjoyed the present; but, as soon as she was alone and had time for reflection, she was tormented by the reproaches of her conscience, feeling how terribly ungrateful and deceitful she had been with Mother Annunciata and all the Sisters who had been so kind to her, a penniless orphan. She so longed to see them again, to obtain their forgiveness, and still more, that of Father Harris. She never thought of him without a pang of remorse and sorrow.

And, if she missed her earthly friends, how far more terrible was the sorrow she experienced at having forfeited her privilege, as a frequent communicant and adorer of the Blessed Sacrament. How often she yearned for those happy, peaceful convent days and for the pure joys of her childhood! How bitterly she repented of her disobedience, in associating with Mazie, whose treacherous conduct she now saw clearly.

The Altazzis took her to live first in Paris, then in Leipsic, in order to study under the most famous teachers, for she had soon gone beyond Signor Altazzi's talent. They kept her very strictly in private life, as the manager was anx-

ious to hide his jewel from all eyes till he was ready to startle the whole world by the revelation of her wondrous gifts, and indeed, she had to work so hard at all her various studies, that she would have had little time for social life.

Meanwhile, what was going on among the loving friends from whom she had been so rudely torn? Before the speeding auto was well out of the city, the Sisters had missed her, and their grief and consternation grew every hour when all efforts to find the child proved fruitless. In vain they searched the house and grounds, telephoned to the homes of all the pupils likely to know anything about her, and even informed the police.

As soon as Mother Annunciata had heard of her disappearance, she had called all the Sisters together and endeavored to gather from them every clue which might help them in their search. The Sister who had had charge of the recreation told of having seen her come in from the street with Mazie before the study hour, and reproached herself for not having taken more notice of it. Mazie was sent for, but pretended utter ignorance of what had happened, saying, that all she knew, was that a tall dark man had been seen wandering around the convent for the last few days. Then, with many bitter tears and expressions of remorse, poor Sister Martha told of

having sent the child out to get some butter.

“Why, Sister, dear, you have nothing to reproach yourself about on that score,” answered the Superior, kindly, “has not Chiquita been in the habit of running our errands ever since she was quite a little thing? You could not possibly guess there was the slightest danger in her going half a block in broad daylight, and you are not in any way to blame whatever may have happened. Oh! if I could only have been in my room when she came there! That lady kept me so uselessly in the parlor, with her endless talk about nothing, and so I missed seeing Chiquita. Perhaps, the poor child knew of some danger or was in some strong temptation, and I might have saved the poor motherless little girl! Oh! what will Father Harris say when he hears about this? When I think of it, she had a letter from him to-day and that was always such a wonderful help to her. I feel sure she would never have voluntarily done wrong on a day when she heard from him.”

“O, Mother!” cried Sister Alberta, bursting into tears, “I am so sorry, but the child had been so inattentive at her lessons all day that I had punished her by keeping her letter until this evening. You know we often punished her that way, but oh! God grant I may be able to give it to her yet! Surely we must find her at last!”

But, as we know, they did not do so and the good Sisters' sorrow was pitiful. As to poor Sister Martha, she was unconsolable in spite of everyone's assurances that she was in no way responsible for their great loss. The child had been specially dear to her, and she was harassed by a dread lest her little Chiquita should have fallen into the hands of wicked people, who would make her lose her faith. Not only did she pray unceasingly for her, but she offered herself up in sacrifice, entreating God to make her suffer anything, even death itself, if thereby she might obtain the salvation of the dear child's soul.

Father Harris was deeply grieved and sadly anxious, feeling in a way responsible for the child who had been confided to him so trustfully by her dying mother. His idea was, that her father must have found trace of her, and spirited her away; the account of the presence of a tall, dark man seemed to confirm this idea, and when all their combined efforts proved fruitless, this was the conclusion everyone came to, everyone except Mazie and her mother, who were too well paid by Signor Altazzi not to keep their secret well. Being powerless to do anything else for their beloved Chiquita, Father Harris and the Sisters were ceaseless in their prayers for her, constantly offering up penances, mortifications

and good works for her welfare. About two years after the child's strange disappearance other events occurred which did but increase their grief at having lost their protégé, and caused still more strenuous efforts to be made to find track of her.

VI

A BRILLIANT DEBUT

FOUR years had passed since Chiquita had left the convent, and the Signorita Margharita Altazzi, as she was now called, was declared to be ready in every way to appear before the public. There had been great discussion as to the opera in which she should first appear, and where she should make her debut. Signor Altazzi had wished her to play the Marguerite in Faust, but that she had flatly refused, as she felt that it would bring too many painful memories, to allow her to enjoy the triumph she felt sure of obtaining. She rather wished to appear as Carmen, a role which suited her dark beauty; but, after much discussion, it was decided that the opera should be Lucia di Lammermoor, and that it should be played at the Grand Opera of Paris.

The Altazzis were in a perfect fever of excitement over every detail which could add to the success of the debutante, but, strangely enough, now that the critical moment was approaching, Margharita seemed strangely indifferent. She was too sure of herself to be nervous, and she

felt as if numbed by the tension of the last few weeks. When the great day came, she allowed herself to be dressed as in a dream, and Signor Altazzi was in perfect despair, fearing that the girl would play and sing without fire or expression, and wondering what on earth had happened to the anticipated star. What had happened, was simply that she was haunted by the recollection of that first visit of hers to the opera, four years ago.

The immense opera house was packed, for a rumor had run abroad that a wonderful star was about to appear, and crowds had come to see her; many of them, however, sneeringly remarking that the unknown debutante would most likely prove a failure. She was said to come from Germany, and was most likely a stout homely Fraulein, with a pretty voice, but little fire or gift as an actress. The minute she appeared on the scene, however, her dazzling beauty, queenly carriage, and the wondrous grace of her every action, electrified the whole audience and there was a burst of applause. For a minute she stood as if petrified, dazzled by the sea of expectant faces before her. Then, with an unconscious prayer for help, she began to sing. Her voice trembled for a minute, but she quickly recovered herself, and her exquisite voice poured forth with such wondrous power, such intense

feeling, that the whole audience listened in breathless ecstasy until she had finished. Then, such a storm of applause burst forth that it filled the whole house with a deafening roar, and it was some time before they could proceed with the opera. And, as the play went on, every time Lucia appeared the enthusiasm grew greater and greater. She was not only a wonderful singer with a rich, exquisite voice; she was a splendid actress who carried her hearers with her, and drew tears from the most cold-hearted. And then her beauty, her undefinable charm of manner! Never in memory of man had there been a greater success than hers. The opera house rang again with a thunder of applause, people clapped and shouted till their hands were sore and their throats hoarse, the stage was covered with the bouquets thrown to her, and more than one great lady in her delirium of admiration, tore off a bracelet or other jewel to fling at her feet. And Chiquita received all this admiration with perfectly self-possessed grace. True, her cheeks glowed and her eyes sparkled with triumphant joy, but she never for a minute lost her composure. When the opera was over and the whole house was wildly crying for her, she was led on to the stage by Signor Altazzi, radiant with joy and pride at the success of his pupil, and she was by far the most self-possessed of the two

as they had to reappear over and over again, till the girl was almost deafened with the shouts and exhausted with the constant bowing and smiling.

Needless to tell of all the congratulations and praise that were showered upon her by those privileged to see her after the closing of the opera house. No triumph could have been more perfect and none more deserved they told her. Her singing, her acting, her beauty, everything had been perfect, and she had outdone herself.

"Was I not right when I promised you that the whole world would be at your feet one day, and told you it would be a sin to hide such talent as yours between the walls of a convent?" said Signor Altazzi when they had finally driven home.

"Yes," she answered wearily, "but what's the good of all that admiration from people I don't care about? I'd have been far happier if you'd left me in my peaceful convent home."

"Ingrate!" he exclaimed angrily. Then added with a laugh: "But you won't think so tomorrow. You're just over-tired tonight, and this is the reaction after your intense excitement. Put the child to bed, mother, for she's only a child still, after all, this girl of sixteen. But what a voice! What acting! Oh! I certainly found a pearl of great price."

When Chiquita was alone with Signora Al-tazzi, her long-suppressed emotion burst out into passionate tears and sobs, and it was only from sheer exhaustion that she finally cried herself to sleep still clinging to her friend's hand. A few hours afterwards, however, she woke up to think of it all, now glorying over her triumph, thinking of all the applause and admiration she had received, and of the intense excitement of the acting, then relapsing into sadness and longing for the friends of her childhood. She seemed haunted by the memory of her first childish triumph, the "Hail! Holy Night," so lovingly, fervently sung at the Midnight Mass in that dear little chapel she would never see again! She thought of Father Harris, when he had told her that her voice was a great gift from God which she should use only for His glory. In vain she tried to drive all those recollections away, to think only of her brilliant future. Those past years of her life haunted her perpetually, and though she promised herself that a great part of her earnings should be spent in charity, she could not feel at rest. Her soul was just craving for its Lord and Master.

VII

MOTHERLESS ONCE MORE

THE glorious success of Signorita Margharita's debut was but the beginning of an uninterrupted series of triumphs, as she was taken from one capital to another, and everywhere the whole population went wild over her. Her youth, her queenly beauty, the charm and elegance of her manners, the dignity and spotlessness of her conduct drew all hearts to her, and her exquisite voice and wonderful acting fairly carried her audiences away, and filled her hearers with the most intense enthusiasm. Kings and princes outdid each other in heaping honors upon her, and giving her priceless jewels. Her photographs were everywhere, her name in every one's mouth. Wherever she went, crowds assembled to greet her, or at least to get a glimpse of her beautiful face. It was enough to turn any girl's head, especially an inexperienced girl of only sixteen. But, like all Spanish girls, Chiquita was very womanly for her age, and she had a wonderfully clear head, firm will and perfect womanly tact.

From the very first, she made her suitors un-

derstand that their attentions were distasteful to her, and that they were to keep their distance. True, she had at first been dazzled and flattered by all the admiration so lavishly showered upon her, but though it satisfied her pride, she soon became, as it were, surfeited with it all, and that weary craving for something higher in life seemed constantly gnawing at her heart. She loved her art, or rather arts, both as a singer and actress, and while on the stage, was so carried away by her part, that she felt as if she really were living it; but, when the opera and the ovation which always followed it were over, she would almost always, on her return home, be seized with sadness and yearning for the days of her childhood back again.

It seemed strange that any girl so devoured with pride and love of admiration as she was, especially a girl who never approached the Sacraments, should be able to keep her soul so unspotted, her maidenly dignity so perfect. And yet it was not strange, after all, for unknown to her, in far away California, a holy nun who had offered herself up as a holocaust for the girl's soul was dying by inches, a slow and agonizing death from cancer, and Father Harris also was offering up ceaseless prayers and Masses for the spiritual child, of whose loss he was inconsolable.

One day when Margharita and Signora Altazzi were driving along near a river in Italy, they saw a group of cruel little boys trying to drown a shaggy-haired puppy. Again and again they threw him in, but in spite of the stones thrown in the hope of sinking him, the poor little beast managed to swim back to shore again. Stopping the carriage and springing out, Margharita flew towards the boys, stormed at them for their cruelty, and, stooping down, took up the poor wet, trembling little creature, who whined pitifully and looked entreatingly up at her with its great, soft brown eyes. To Signora Altazzi's no little consternation, Margharita carried the puppy back to the carriage, wrapped it up in a costly fur cloak, and intimated her intention of keeping it for her own pet. At first, Signor Altazzi objected, stating that he did not like dogs, and that this one was a cur of no breed or pedigree whatever. Margharita quietly replied that if he objected to the dog in his house, she would have a separate establishment of her own, and he immediately yielded and even pretended to be fond of Carlo, as they called the puppy.

Carlo was not, it is true, of any pure breed, nor was he a strictly beautiful dog, but he was a dear, so gentle and intelligent, and loving, that he won all hearts. As for Margharita, he was

like her shadow, and endless were the attentions paid to him by his mistress's admirers, who thus tried to win her favor, as she was immensely fond of her pet.

After having starred all through Europe, it was decided that the Opera Company of which she was the glory, should come over to America. Among other cities, where they were to perform, were the principal ones of California, and they intended to finish up with the fast-growing city of Los Angeles. Chiquita had demurred at going to California at all, but the manager insisted so much that at last she yielded, only on the condition they should not even pass through Santa Benedicta. No one, she told herself, was likely to recognize her in any of the other towns, and if the associations that the sight of California were likely to bring back to her were too painful, well, she'd find some excuse to hurry away.

The morning after her first performance at Los Angeles, tempted by the beauty of the California sunshine and flowers, Chiquita allowed herself to be persuaded to go out with Signora Altazzi and Carlo. Her head ached slightly, and her adopted mother thought that a walk would be the best thing to shake it off. It was nearly half past ten, however, before they started, and, as they were making their way back to the hotel, they found themselves mixed up with a dense

crowd of people anxious to see the circus parade. These western crowds, though good-natured enough, are decidedly rough, and the ladies were both scared and bewildered in this seething throng. What was their consternation, however, when they discovered that in the crowd they had lost poor Carlo!

They hastily turned back to look for him; they searched for hours, then went back to the hotel, Margharita in floods of tears and the Signora deeply distressed at the girl's passionate sorrow. The police were notified and a ridiculously large reward offered for the dog, and Chiquita was at last comforted by being assured that her pet would surely be restored to her. She outdid herself that evening in her part, but after she arrived home she sobbed herself to sleep, mourning for the humble little friend whose love for her was so true and disinterested.

The next day, she waited in feverish impatience, expecting every minute to hear that he had been found, but as the afternoon wore on and no Carlo appeared, she was inconsolable, for they were obliged to leave by the night train to go and sing in a city of the Middle West the next evening. Orders were left that if found, the little dog should be sent on to them at once, but in spite of the tempting reward and all the efforts that were made to locate the great singer's

pet, not a trace could be found of him, and his mistress mourned deeply for him. In vain were priceless dogs of wonderful pedigree offered to her by the dozen, she would not even look at them, declaring that it was not the dog she missed, but his loving devotion and personality, and that no other pet should or could ever take his place.

About six months later, Signora Altazzi heard that her mother was dying in Gurin and wished to see her, and she was, of course, very anxious to go at once. Signor Altazzi would not hear of it at first, but Margharita insisted that the Signora should go if she wished to, and, as usual, her desires prevailed. In fact, she could always do anything with Signor Altazzi, for, if crossed, she calmly declared she would refuse to sing that night, and as she had carried out her threat once, he knew it was no idle boast. Her non-appearance meant the loss of thousands of dollars, and the manager was not anxious to run such risks. He had made a signed agreement with Signorita Margharita, to the effect that he was to have half her proceeds for the first two years, and that if she broke away from him before that time was up, she should pay him a very large sum, proportionate to the length of time of which she defrauded him. Chiquita had now been singing a year and a half, and though very wealthy and

humored in every way, she longed for the time when she would be free from Signor Altazzi, whom she had always disliked, much as she loved his wife.

The manager having been obliged to yield as to his wife's journey to Italy, she procured the services of a thoroughly experienced, reliable, and pious middle-aged lady as companion and chaperon for Margharita, and with many kisses and tears, the girl and her adopted mother who had never been parted a single day for the last six years, took a sorrowful leave of each other. They were at London just then, but the very same day that the Signora started for Gurin, Chiquita accompanied by her companion and maid and Signor Altazzi, went off to Russia, where she was to sing at a State Concert before the Imperial Court.

It was supposed that the Signora's mother could not live many days, and that as soon as the funeral was over, her daughter would hasten to join the others in St. Petersburg. Owing to the fact of their traveling in opposite directions and the mail taking a considerable time to reach St. Petersburg from Gurin, it was over a week before Margharita received a letter, and when she did so, she learned with sorrow and bewilderment that not only had the Signora arrived too late to see her mother, but that on her journey

she had herself caught a violent chill which had resulted in pneumonia. Her sister, who wrote for her, said that the Signora desired that Margharita should not be made anxious about her, but she added that she thought it was best the girl should know that her adopted mother was very dangerously sick, and that the doctor had little hope of saving her. Margharita was in despair and wanted to start at once for Gurin, but she was again to appear before the Emperor and Empress that evening, and Signor Altazzi proved to her that she could reach Italy just as fast by starting early the next morning, and that her engagement was not one that could possibly be put off. Though wild with anxiety, the girl yielded, preparing everything for her departure early the next morning. In spite of her distress, her acting and singing were magnificent, and the Czarina, moved to tears, unfastened the magnificent diamond brooch which fastened a spray of rare orchids to her breast, and pinned it with her own hands to the beautiful blushing prima donna's gown. Margharita received the gift with her usual tactful grace, feeling deeply moved at the kind words of admiration and sympathy the Czarina spoke to her.

Not for a minute, however, had she forgotten her sorrow and anxiety about her loving friend, and as soon as she could get away she did so,

and drove hurriedly to the hotel to finish preparing for her journey the next morning. On arriving at her apartments, however, she found a telegram waiting for her, and opened it with trembling fingers. Her face paled as she read it, the room seemed to be wheeling round her, a strange darkness falling over her, and stretching out her hands with a low cry of pain, she fell fainting in the arms of her lady companion. It was no use for her to start now, the Signora Altazzi had died that morning, "fortified by all the rites of Holy Church," added the telegram.

Margharita was simply broken-hearted, so prostrated with grief that she could not be persuaded to see anyone or even to take food. Expressions of sympathy poured in on all sides, for, though it was known that the girl was only an adopted daughter, her devotion to the Signora was proverbial. Even the Czarina, hearing of the beautiful girl's intense grief, was kind enough to write her an autograph letter of sympathy, which touched the young singer far more than the gift of the priceless diamond brooch had done.

The one thing which had been a solace to Chiquita was to know that her loved friend had died a holy death and received the Sacraments. A few days later she received a long letter from the Signora's sister giving all the details of her sickness and death, and delivering her last lov-

ing messages to Margharita. She said that her only regret in leaving this world was to leave Margharita alone and unprotected, and she bade her thank God with her for having allowed her to die at home among her own people, where she had been able to make her peace with God and die happy, strengthened by the Sacraments, and especially by her dear Lord's forgiveness and His presence in her heart. "You will soon be freed from your engagement with the Signor, dearest," she added, "but do not wait until then to have a separate establishment of your own and, as soon as you are your own mistress, make your peace with God, and observe your religion faithfully in future. You will never be happy until you do, my own. Remember this was my dying wish."

Chiquita trembled as she read the last words, for, having stayed away from confession so long, she felt as if she could never go again, as if this were a task beyond her strength and courage. Anyhow, her foster-mother had not expected her to do this until she was free, and that gave her breathing time. She insisted on parting company with the Signor immediately, though they remained very good friends, and she was really grateful to him for the magnificent education he had given her. She also determined to be faithful to her engagement to him, up to the very

last day, and did not spare herself, but sang several times a week on an average, both of them reaping a golden harvest each time she appeared.

The very last weeks of her engagement were to be spent in a second American tour and, strangely enough, it was to end by a couple of operatic nights at Los Angeles, of which Chiquita now hated the very name, though in a way she was almost glad to go there, always having a vague hope of hearing something of her beloved Carlo.

VIII

LITTLE BRIDGET AND HER FRIEND

WAS it because her engagement with Signor Altazzi was to come to an end in a couple of days, and that in future she would have to rely more entirely upon herself, or was it simply because the sight of California again brought back so vividly the scenes and friends of her childhood, and the recollection of the loss of her pet? Signorita Margharita could not have told herself, but all she knew was that one of those unaccountable fits of depression, weariness, and disgust of everything had taken possession of her, even before the train arrived at Los Angeles. There had been an unavoidable delay about the arrival of the company, and they barely reached the city in time to prepare for the first representation. Of course, the house was more than packed and the audience simply delirious with enthusiasm, for, strange to say, Margharita's moods never affected her singing or acting, as she always forgot everything but her part when on the stage.

She hastened back to her hotel after the per-

formance, however, and her heart felt heavy as lead. It seemed to her as if some great and unknown sorrow had fallen upon her, and she felt as broken-hearted as she had been after her foster-mother's death. For hours she tossed about restlessly and nothing she could do seemed to ease that wretched aching at her heart. She tried to read, but the words had no meaning for her, she tried to think of her triumph that night, but the thought of it only palled upon her.

At last she fell into an uneasy, fitful sleep, and she dreamed that she saw Father Harris coming towards her as in the days of her childhood. At first she seemed unchanged, but suddenly she realized how sorrowfully and reproachfully he was looking at her, and as she tried to hasten towards him, he appeared to get further and further from her and finally vanished from before her eyes. She woke herself up with a moan of pain, and again she lay for hours vainly trying to drive away the recollection of him and of his look of reproach. At last she dozed again and this time she found herself in the church at Santa Benedicta. She was at a funeral and the mournful music made her heart ache, but she did not know who was lying in that coffin. At last someone came and took her by the hand saying, "You will take a last look at him," and drew her, much against her will, towards

the coffin. And as she gazed awe-struck, the closed eyes slowly opened and looked at her once more with that sorrowful expression of appeal and reproach. It was Father Harris! Margharita tried to scream, but she could not, and at last she woke up, thankful beyond words to find this was but a dream. Still she could not rid herself of the haunting remembrance of that look of reproach and pleading. Was it really a message from the dead? Trembling and scared she fell on her knees by the bedside, and remembering the dying Signora's wish, prayed for help and courage to enable her to find her true friend, and become a practical Catholic once more.

It seemed to her the night would never end, and she wished with all her heart she had never come back to California and its painful reminiscences. As soon as the first gleams of light appeared, she rose and dressed hastily, determined to go out and seek relief in the fresh air and beauty of the morning. Her chaperon was still sleeping heavily, wearied by the fatigues of the last few days and Margharita resolved not to wake her. She would have no need of a chaperon at that time in the morning she thought.

There were as yet but very few people in the streets when she first got out, and she began hurrying along as if to escape from her harassing thoughts and aching heart. Soon she had hur-

ried through the business quarter and passed through street after street of beautiful residences, surrounded by stately palms, graceful pepper trees and a whole wealth of brilliantly colored flowers of all kinds. In the trees the birds were singing their morning hymn, happy and rejoicing in the bright sunshine and balmy air, and although the girl hardly noticed all these things, yet they produced a soothing and softening impression on her, calming her overwrought nerves and making her think lovingly of the giver of all this beauty and peace.

Still she hurried on, hardly noticing that she had turned into a much poorer part of the town and that the stately villas were replaced by poor cottages, mere shacks some of them, around which scores of children of all nations were playing. There were jolly little negroes with their fuzzy curls, and swarthy Indians and Mexicans with great dark eyes and straight black hair, and children of the white races, some of them so fair that their hair was bleached almost white. They stared not a little at the lovely lady hurrying past them without a look or a smile, as if unconscious of all that went on around her.

All of a sudden, Margharita gave a cry of surprise and joy, for a short distance ahead of her, following a poor little pale-faced girl whose scanty garments were almost in rags, was a little

shaggy-haired dog and the more she looked at him the more sure she was that it was her lost pet, her own dear Carlo! He was trotting close by the poor child's side and looking up lovingly at her every now and then with those soft brown eyes of his, while she talked to him in a soft crooning voice, a wan smile lighting up her poor pinched face as she did so.

The great singer sprang forward, and clutching the child by the arm, exclaimed angrily, "Here! you little thief! I've caught you at last. That's *my* dog."

The poor child's face flushed, her eyes filled with tears and she looked frightened to death, but she answered quickly:

"Oh, no mam! that ain't your dog, that's my dear doggie that Our Lady sent me. I've had him best part of a year, mam, all the neighbors can tell you I've had him best part of a year," she added, sobbing and wringing her hands.

Carlo had recognized Margharita and was alternately leaping all over her with every sign of joy and recognition, and then jumping up at the child, licking her hands and face with plaintive whines as if to comfort her.

"It's just about a year since I lost my dog," said Margharita, still in a harsh angry voice, "how did you come to get him?"

For a few minutes the little girl sobbed so that

she couldn't speak; at last she managed to tell her sad story:

"It was one evening as there was a circus a'going on, and the woman as has me—she ain't my mother, for dear mother she dead and father, too—and the woman she sends me out to sell some flowers, but the people they was too anxious 'bout the circus for to care for flowers, so I couldn't sell hardly any, and I was a'crying as I comed home, for I knowed the woman ad beat me and send me to bed without supper, and I was that hungry! And I felt that lonesome and sad like that I wished I was dead with mother, and then I remembered she'd a told me always to pray to Our Lady when I was in trouble, and I prayed, oh! that hard, that she'd send me a friend. I didn't seem to mind so much being hungry if only I had a friend to love me always And I hardly done a'praying when I heard a pattering noise and I was that scared! till I seed it was nothing but a pore little dawg, and some of them limbs of boys had tied an old saucepan to its tail, and that was a'scaring him almost to death. I had lots o' trouble to ketch him, but I managed to, and got that there saucepan off, and petted him and wiped him with my dress cose he was all wet and muddy. Then I just crawled into my cupboard, for I knowed it warn't no good asking for any supper, and the dear

doggy he comes and cuddles up in me arms and ever since he's never left me, and there ain't a day but I've thanked Our Lady for sending him to me that night. And oh mam! mam!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands while the tears streamed down her thin starved-looking face, "don't take my doggie away! he's the only one I've got in the world to love me!"

The child's grief was evidently so genuine, her cry was so pathetic that a woman must indeed have had a heart of stone not to feel touched by it. Chiquita's eyes were moist and her voice trembled as she laid her hand on the little girl's shoulder, and said gently, "Where do you live? Show me."

"Taint a very nice place for a pretty lady like yourself ter go to, but the woman as has me was that drunk last night that I don't expects she'll be awake yet, so you won't get none of her jaw anyways," and the little girl, whose name was Bridget, led the young actress into one of the slummiest parts of the town, down a dingy street, where most unprepossessing looking characters were walking about, and stared covetously at the beautifully dressed lady and at the costly jewels on her fingers.

At last little Bridget stopped by one of the most squalid looking shacks and opening a low

door on one side of it, showed what must have been intended for a coal hole originally.

"That's where me and Toby sleeps," she explained, "I used to be awful scared of the rats and mice and crawlin' bugs till I had Toby, but after Our Lady sent him I felt all safe with me Toby. You see it must have been Our Lady as sent him, cose he comed to me just the very minute as I was a'begging 'er to send me a friend, and oh, lady! lady! please don't take me Toby away, for he's just a lovely friend to me!"

"I won't part you and Toby," said Margharita gently, "Now show me the rest."

The child half fearfully pushed open a door leading straight into a squalidly dirty room, reeking with the smell of drink, and in which a coarse, bloated-looking woman was stretched upon a heap of dirty rags on the floor.

"I've seen enough, come away, come with me, poor child," said Margharita impulsively, "and let us get away from this awful neighborhood as soon as we can."

The companion and maid were not a little astonished when the young actress got back to the hotel and confided to them the care of the little beggar child and the shaggy-haired dog, both of whom she requested the maid to bathe and comb, afterwards dressing the little girl in some clothes she had bought for her on the way.

Signorita Margharita seemed transformed. Never had they seen such a glow of real happiness on her beautiful face, such a joyful lustre in her magnificent eyes. Her face was so softened and illumined with her delight that it looked like that of some happy innocent child. To be sure she was only eighteen after all!

It was not only that she had found her long lost pet again, but although the young actress had always been lavishly generous to all manner of charity, she had never before been able to *personally* perform such a work of mercy as she thought of now, and the very prospect of it filled her heart with that purest of all joy, that of doing good.

IX

BRING FORTH THE BEST ROBE

It was a strange idea which had come to the young *prima donna*. This child's history, the sight of the misery she had been in, the account of her loneliness, all this had touched Chiquita's warm heart to the quick and she suddenly determined that this poor little waif should be what she might have been, a quietly happy, peaceful, convent-bred child, perhaps later on a saintly zealous nun like Mother Annunciata. She should have every comfort, every advantage of education, everything that money and love could give her, but she should not be thrown into the turmoil and dangers of the world. Margharita would watch her grow up, and see in her, as in a living mirror, the Chiquita that might have been.

But how was this to be brought about? What convent should she take her to? Would she have any legal proceeding to go through in order to have lawful possession of the child, she wondered? Whom could she consult? A Catholic priest? The very thought made her feel nerv-

ous and frightened, for it was so long since she'd spoken to a priest. And yet, why not? No one would know her here, and did she not mean to go to confession herself soon! She might as well take the first step at once.

So, as soon as she had breakfasted, she made a more careful toilette, and leaving Carlo and the now radiant Bridget in charge of her companion, she hastened to the nearest rectory. As she drew near it, however, her courage nearly forsook her and she almost turned back two or three times. Still, she was really anxious to do her best for Bridget and nerving herself she hastened up the steps. Even at the very door she hesitated, but, feeling that a passer-by was looking at her inquisitively, she hastily rang the bell and soon found herself in the parlor of the rectory.

"Oh! any of the Fathers, I don't care which, for I don't know any of them," she answered hastily in reply to the housekeeper's query.

It all seemed so strange, and yet so familiar. The beautiful crucifix on the wall, the pictures of the Sacred Heart and Our Lady. Oh! what memories they brought back! She was getting more and more unnerved, her heart beat fast and she tremblingly pressed together her little hands, sparkling with priceless jewels. Could this shy, nervous girl be the great prima donna,

ever so calm and self-possessed even when receiving the enthusiastic admiration of countless crowds, and the homage of the greatest dignitaries in every land? Had she not always prided herself on her perfect self-command? Yet whom was she expecting to see now? Only a simple, hard working priest. What would he be like when he came in? She heard his step at last, and again it sounded strangely familiar, and seemed to set her heart beating more wildly than ever.

The door opened, and a tall, slight, ascetic looking Jesuit came into the room, a priest who, though evidently anything but an old man, was grey already. His singularly sweet and kindly face was very thin and worn by much suffering and anxious work. For an instant, although Margharita knew he was there, she dared not look up, still she arose and moved towards him with all her queenly grace of manner.

Then, in spite of herself, she raised her eyes and uttered a low cry—was it joy or pain? She hardly knew, for there before her stood Father Harris, but oh! so aged, so altered, with such lines of suffering and care upon his face! For an instant he gazed at the beautiful, elegantly dressed girl, then a look of intense joy illumined and transfigured him, and with outstretched hands and swimming eyes he cried: “Oh, Chi-

quita, my child! my child! come back to us at last after all these years! Sister Martha's sacrifice has not been in vain. How good God has been to let me see you and welcome you back before I die. I have so prayed for it. Where have you been, Chiquita? I feared—I hardly knew what not to fear for you, poor child!"

Chiquita stood, stunned and speechless, for a few moments. She felt as if she ought to explain that she had not known of his being there, that she had come on another errand, but his look of joy was so intense that she could not bear to disappoint him and besides, after all, had she not meant to make her peace with God in a few days? and was not her joy at seeing him once more still greater than his could be?

"Oh Father, Father!" she cried at last, taking his thin hand in her little bejeweled ones and pressing it reverently to her lips. "I have behaved badly, ungratefully I know, but oh! I am so happy to feel that I can be your child once more. I've been vain and frivolous, Father, but God in His mercy has saved me from any greater sin. I've always worn my Child of Mary medal and never forfeited my right to it, though I've been an actress. You've heard of Margharita Altazzi, Father?"

"Altazzi! You have become that great singer that all the world is raving about? You, little

Chiquita! Yes, God has indeed been merciful, for if one has heard of your talents, the fame of your spotless life has also come before you, Chiquita. Poor Sister Martha! If she could only have known before she died—but she knows now.”

“Sister Martha, the dear old lay Sister at the convent, do you mean?” asked Chiquita anxiously.

“Ah! you may well call her the dear old Sister, my child, for you little know what you owe to that saintly woman,” said the Father earnestly. Then in a moved voice he told the young actress how the humble nun had offered herself up, to suffer and die for the salvation of their little Chiquita’s soul, told of the long years of agonizing pain so patiently, lovingly borne for her sake, and added: “It was only two days ago that her pure soul passed to its heavenly reward. Almost her last words were to offer up her life for you. Yesterday they laid her to rest and today you have come back to us, having passed unscathed through the greatest temptation. Oh! we can never be grateful enough to that humble woman, Chiquita. What about your religious duties? Have you been faithful to them, child?” Then seeing the girl’s eyes swimming with tears, he added kindly: “Let us sit down and you will tell me the whole story of your life.”

At first the young singer could not speak. The account of Sister Martha's sacrifice had so moved her that for a few minutes she sobbed uncontrollably. When she was able to recover her composure, however, she told the kind priest all, her many vain, rebellious thoughts as a convent child, her first disobedience and deceit in going to the opera, and all the other events of her life even to her strange dreams of him that night, and to the finding of little Bridget in the morning, and the real object of her visit to the rectory.

"How wonderfully God's grace and Our Lady's help have pursued and helped you, Chiquita, in spite of all your unfaithfulness. Does it not seem almost a miracle that you should have found that poor little Catholic orphan this morning and that through your charity to her, you should have unconsciously come to see me here?"

"It does, indeed, and I can never, never be grateful enough, and now what do you want me to do, Father? I'll obey you blindly, whatever it costs me, for I mean to atone for the past. Dear Sister Martha's sacrifice shall not have been made in vain."

Father Harris smiled and gave a low, happy laugh.

"That's just like you, Chiquita. You have not changed and there were never any half measures

about you. Well, first of all, I want you to go to the Chapel and prepare to make a good confession."

"But, Father! it is six years since I went to confession. I shall never be able to think of everything in a few hours."

"I think you have pretty well made your confession to me already," he said, with a smile, "and in any case I feel sure you're quite prepared to make one today, and I don't even intend to give you hours and hours to prepare. I'll take you before the Tabernacle and there at Our Dear Lord's feet I will give you half an hour in which to think of your sins. During that time I shall sit near my confessional and pray for you. It is always good to strike the iron while it's hot you know, Chiquita, and besides, you might come tomorrow and find me gone, and you would find it more difficult to tell all to a stranger."

"Gone, Father?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes, child, I have been seriously ill for several years. It is heart trouble and doctors say that although I may live for many years, on the other hand I might die any minute, so you see it is best to be on the safe side. Don't cry, Chiquita, I have something very wonderful to tell you after you've made your confession. Come

to Our Dear Lord now. He has been waiting for you far too long already."

So he led her into the quiet little Chapel, and as she knelt before the Tabernacle she sobbed out all her remorse, her gratitude, and felt how weary had been her yearning for her Lord during those long years in which she had turned her back upon Him.

When Father Harris had called her to the confessional he was moved to happy tears by her fervent contrition, her deep humility and her intense desire to make amends for the past. After she had been absolved, and had made a long and earnest thanksgiving, they went back to the parlor where the young singer was to hear of something which would once more change the whole course of her life.

X

FOUND AT LAST

WHEN Father Harris and his penitent had returned to the parlor her first words were an anxious inquiry.

“Will you expect me to give up my art, Father?”

“Your acting, perhaps, your singing, certainly not, for I think you can do much good with it, but there are others who wish to decide most things for you, Chiquita, and while you were making your thanksgiving, I was sending off a cablegram to Spain which will bring intense joy to the hearts of those who receive it. It consisted of but a few words: ‘Dona Esperanza found. Come at once to San Francisco.’”

“Esperanza? yes! I know that is my real name. But who were you telegraphing to?”

“Ah! that is my secret,” said Father Harris. “But now I will tell you all. Only a few years after your disappearance, Mother Annunciata had a visit from a Spanish priest sent as ambassador by one of the wealthiest and most dis-

tinguished families of the high Spanish aristocracy."

"How is Mother Annunciata? Shall I be able to go and see her?" interrupted Chiquita.

"Yes, she is now Mother Superior at San Francisco and will be overjoyed to see her child once more. But don't you wish to know who these Spanish grandees were and what they wanted?"

"Yes," answered the girl, "but I'm half afraid. It wasn't my father, was it?"

"No, if it had been, I should not have let him know your whereabouts, for it was your mother's dying wish you should be shielded from his influence. These people are your grandparents. They had two children only, an idolized son, and your mother. When only sixteen she fell in love with her music master, whose beautiful voice won her heart, and she met, of course, with the parents' violent opposition, for there are no people in the world more exclusive than the real Spanish grandees. So she finally ran away and got married to the musician. She soon bitterly repented of it, for not only was she altogether cast off by her family, but she soon discovered her husband to be utterly worthless. After a short time he became an anarchist, and forbade your mother ever to put her foot inside a church again, or speak to you of God or Our Lady. She had borne poverty, loneliness, and ill-usage, but

when he tried to step between her child and God, your mother determined to save you from his influence at all costs. Selling a few jewels that she had concealed from him, she came over to America as a poor emigrant and made her way to California. There she hid herself in that little cabin in the woods, where I finally found her dying and where she confided you to me, Chiquita. Before we buried her, we found hanging around her neck some medals and a locket containing a lock of hair and a portrait, while outside of it were engraved some dates and the name Tullita. I kept these carefully, thinking they might perhaps be useful some day in identifying you, and this proved to be the case.

“Very soon after your mother’s death, her only brother who was unmarried was killed by a fall from his horse, and his broken-hearted parents found themselves childless and without a direct heir to their vast estates. They had known that your mother had fallen into great poverty, they now heard that she had run away from her unworthy husband who had been, but a few months afterwards, killed in a revolutionary outbreak. So now they were anxious to find their daughter again, and restore her to her place as heiress of their estates, which would otherwise pass to a much hated younger branch of the family, faithless to its king and to the traditions of its race.

“They made every effort to find a trace of your mother, but for many years their efforts were fruitless. At last, almost by a miracle, this Spanish priest traced her to her mountain home and heard of her death, and of your subsequent adoption by the Sisters of the Convent of Santa Benedicta. Overjoyed, he hastened there, only to find that two years previously you had been spirited away by your father as we then thought. He proved to us that this was impossible, as your wretched father had been dead many years, and having made doubly sure of your identity by the locket which he took back to the bereaved parents, they joined us in an eager search for you the world over. It was strange when I think of it now, that remembering your wonderfully beautiful voice, we should never have looked upon that as a clue. Your grandfather was almost broken-hearted, and has long given up all hope of finding you, but your grandmother who is, I hear, a most charming and intensely pious woman, has always been confident that her prayers would be answered some day or other.”

“Strange! I sang several times in the principal Spanish cities and even before the Spanish court. I wonder if we met without knowing it, my grandmother and I?”

“Surely, for the Marchesa Maria del Espinola is one of the Queen’s ladies-in-waiting.”

"Marchesa del Espinola! I have seen her several times, a stately, beautiful woman with white hair and magnificent eyes, almost more queenly and dignified than the Queen herself! I wonder what she will think of her grand-daughter having been an actress, this great lady of the bluest of blue Castilian blood," added Chiquita, with a little laugh.

"I have not the slightest doubt but that she will be duly horrified," laughed Father Harris, "but your wonderful success and unimpeachable reputation will reconcile her to some extent, still I think your days as an actress are over, Chiquita."

"Well, I have to play tonight. It is my last engagement. After that I will be free and can take a holiday while awaiting the arrival of my noble relatives. I rather dread meeting them! they seemed so terribly aristocratic!"

"Do you know what I should advise you to do, Chiquita? Take little Bridget with you and go to San Francisco, where you can leave her as you had intended in Mother Annunciata's care. Spend a day or two enjoying your dear Mother Superior once more, then go for a week to the Sacred Heart Convent where I will be giving a retreat for ladies."

"You will, Father? Oh! how delightful!" cried

Chiquita. "There seems no end to God's goodness to me."

"No, his mercy is infinite, and the angels are rejoicing with Him today, Chiquita, over the sincere return of His faithless child."

Words cannot depict the joy and thankfulness with which Mother Annunciata once more embraced her lost child, and heard of her sincere resolve to serve God earnestly in the future. Little Bridget was received with open arms, and soon found herself so surrounded by loving friends that she bravely, though tearfully, made the sacrifice of giving up her little Toby to her benefactress.

A week later, when she entered the convent in which she was to make her retreat, Chiquita went at once to the Chapel, and falling on her knees, she said with a firm resolve to follow every impulse of grace: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" No one made that retreat with more fervent devotion, though everyone was fairly carried away by the heart-stirring eloquence of Father Harris, by his wonderful gift in the direction of souls, by the atmosphere of burning piety that reigned in the place, and by the exquisite music which seemed to set the coldest hearts on fire with the love of God. No one knew who the chief singer was, but her glorious voice vibrating with fervor and emotion filled the

Chapel with its wonderful power and pathos, and seemed more like that of an angel than of a woman. Her "O Salutaris and Tantum Ergos" moved her hearers to tears, so intense and passionate was the feeling of adoration, love, and praise, the singer put into them.

At the end of the retreat there were found to be many vocations, which had sprung out of it, but Chiquita's was not one of them. She had found intense peace, happiness, and an earnest desire to spend the rest of her life in working for the greater glory of God, but in spite of her deep piety, Father Harris did not find that she had any vocation to the religious life, and advised her to make up her mind to sanctify herself in the world as so many saints had done before her.

Just fifteen days after the sending of the cablegram, the Marchese and Marchesa d'Espinolas arrived at San Francisco where they were overjoyed to find their beautiful, accomplished, and altogether charming grand-daughter. Her graceful carriage and stately manners delighted them, and her warm heart and sympathetic nature soon won their deep love. One thing only troubled them, and that was to think that their heiress should have had the disgrace of playing on the stage! To them, this was a bitter humiliation and they were eager to prosecute Signor Altazzi

for having kidnapped their beloved child. This, however, Chiquita strongly opposed, on account of her deep love for her dead foster-mother. Only on the condition that the d'Espinolas should forget the past, would she promise never to go on the stage again, so they were forced to give in, but they insisted that, having so large a fortune coming to her from them, she should keep none of the money she had earned by her public singing.

Her share of the profits of these two years amounted to a very large sum, but happy to yield to their wishes in this respect she divided it into two parts, one of which she gave as dowry to little Bridget, while the other she spent in building and endowing an orphanage in memory of Sister Martha, to whose prayers she always said she owed more than her life.

Scarcely a year later, the beautiful Dona Esperanza was happily married to one of the most distinguished and influential grandees of Spain. She was a very devoted wife and mother, and very happy in her family life. Everywhere she was enthusiastically received, and her tireless charity made her fairly idolized by the poor and unfortunate ones of life. Appointed one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting, she exerted all her influence to further God's glory and help all who were in trouble. She did not give up her singing,

but never performed in public except at Court by special request of her sovereigns, or at concerts for the benefit of some charity or other.

As these concerts were the only opportunities the public now had of hearing her, people were willing to pay any price for a seat, and however large the sale might be, it was always packed to its very limits by a wildly enthusiastic crowd, and a magnificent golden harvest was reaped for God's poor. But the lovely young Marquesa seemed entirely free from the vanity and love of admiration which had devoured the child Chiquita and the young singer, Margharita Altazzi. It had been on the wane for some time and seemed to completely die within her on the day when, with tears pouring down her cheeks, she knelt in loving prayer and thanksgiving on the grave of the humble obscure lay Sister who had, by offering herself up as a loving holocaust, saved this idol of a giddy world from the consequences of her pride, and obtained her true and lasting conversion, and her lifelong devotion for the loving service of God.

THE END



A MOTHER'S HEART

FOREWORD

The author, who is considered one of the best writers for children, and who is a favorite among them, has given much time and effort in preparing this story, which is intended to teach a great and important lesson, namely the fearful danger to young people caused by reading trashy, if not bad, literature. We know you will read each chapter with great interest.

Young Catholic Messenger.

A Mother's Heart

I

BACK TO THE FOLD

IN the darkened room, the young mother lay dying and her husband was kneeling at the foot of the bed, his face hidden in his hands, his whole frame shaken with low, heartbroken sobs. James Harrison was a good, honorable, kind-hearted man, but he had been brought up with very narrow, bigoted ideas, and before he had married this pretty girlish Elsie, he had made her understand clearly that she must choose between him and her faith. The girl was an orphan, she longed for a life of ease and pleasure, she yearned for love such as she felt sure her lover would give her, and she had found life anything but easy, since she had had to earn her own living after leaving the convent school, where she had been so lovingly brought up by the Sisters. So, after a long struggle against grace, she had consented to what her lover asked of her. She could afterward go to Church with-

out his knowing it, she said to herself, and, besides, she would convert him before long. He loved her so dearly he surely could not refuse her anything when once she was his wife! And with these thoughts she soothed her accusing conscience.

But there could be no blessing on such a marriage, and Elsie's heart could find no rest. Her husband often noticed how sad and preoccupied she looked, and rightly guessing that this was caused by her regret at having given up her faith, he tried to make her forget it by indulging to the full her love of pleasure and excitement. For a time he spent his money recklessly in parties, dinners, receptions, and in taking her out to theatres and other places of amusement. Then, when he began to tire of this, and found he would be ruined if he continued, she became fretful and discontented, complained that he was unkind to her, and found her only consolation in poring over silly novels and magazine stories of the trashy kind. She neglected her home, even her dear little baby boy, and she made both herself and her husband thoroughly miserable. Yet she was not bad at heart, only she had turned her back on God, and without Him we cannot be either good or happy.

And now she was dying, so young, so fair, so helpless, with her three-weeks-old little daughter

lying on the cot beside her and her boy a year old crying lustily in another room. Poor little Elsie! how bitterly she repented of her fault now! How she longed for God's pardon, for God's love, for the comforts of our Holy Faith!

But she had been a child of Mary, and now, in her dire extremity, she cried to her for help. Did our Blessed Mother ever turn a deaf ear to a repentant child? Ah, no! and even before poor Elsie had called to her for help, she had forestalled her prayer by sending to her as nurse a fervent, fearless Catholic, who had taken every opportunity of speaking to her of God and of Our Lady, while doing her very utmost to save her life. For the last hour or so the sick girl had been lying apparently unconscious, when suddenly she opened her soft brown eyes and faintly called her husband. Springing to his feet he came and bent over her, with a mighty effort smothering his grief, and speaking cheerily and soothingly.

"James," she murmured entreatingly, "do you still love me?"

"Oh, Elsie, my darling! more than ever!" he cried. "There is nothing, nothing I would not do for you!"

"I want you—to grant me—two things—before I die!"

"But you're not going to die, my dearest; you

must not think of such a thing. You are going to get well and be my joy, and the loving mother of our dear children."

"No—I know—I'm sure I'm going to die, and I want you to send for—a priest—oh! I cannot die—like this!"

He recoiled, and a hard look came over his face.

"You promised—to do—anything!" she gasped.

"Yes. Well, all right, you shall have your wish," he murmured. "Nurse, will you please phone for the priest?"

A flood of joy passed over the young wife's pale face.

"Oh, thank you, dearly, James!" she murmured. "Then I want you to promise—that my two children—shall be brought up Catholics."

The words had come out with an effort, her color coming and going, the perspiration standing in great beads on her forehead, a look of piteous entreaty in her dark eyes. "Oh, promise—I am dying—I entreat you!"

Poor James Harrison looked dumb-founded. He felt he couldn't refuse his dying wife's last wish; he was too honorable to give a promise and not keep it; and yet, how was he to bring the children up as Catholics, when he and all his people were Protestants? His wife seemed to read his thoughts, for looking up at the sweet-

faced nurse, who had just returned from phoning, she gasped, turning towards her:

"*She* is a Catholic, she will help you, she will mind them—promise—both of you!" and solemnly, earnestly, they both promised, hardly knowing how they would be able to carry out their vow, but determined to do so.

After the priest had given the dying mother all the last Sacraments and reconciled her completely with God, he baptized her two children by her bedside, and when that was done and she had kissed them rapturously, she murmured:

"Oh, James, thank you—so much. Remember your promise! Oh! I am so happy—so happy at last—God is so good and—I feel Our Lady's arms around me. She is—taking me—home!"

A whole year had passed since the young mother's death, and under the loving care of nurse Marian and her old mother, poor Elsie's babies had grown and thriven, and had never felt that lack of a mother's love, for nurse Marian's heart had gone out to them from the first. Their father came constantly to see them, or was it to see Marian, who had so generously given up her career to care for his orphaned children? Anyhow, at the end of a year he persuaded her to marry him, and a very loving, devoted wife she made. This time he had known better than to ask his betrothed to give up her faith; first,

because he knew she would never consent to do so; and secondly, because, since he knew her and her mother, his ideas about the Catholic Church had greatly changed and he had overcome many of his prejudices.

A few years after his second marriage, Mr. Harrison thought he had heard of a good opening in the West, and they therefore gave up their home in Springfield and went to live in California. The second Mrs. Harrison's saintly old mother had passed to her reward a few months before, and James' family had never quite forgiven him for allowing his children to be brought up in what they termed the Popish faith, so that the young people had little regret in leaving the East. Nobody in their new home city knew anything about them, and though in course of time three more children came to bless their home, no one could have guessed by the mother's behavior that the elder ones were not her very own, for she was perfectly devoted to them, and they grew to be big children without any knowledge of the fact that they had lost their own mother.

This had been their father's wish, and Mrs. Harrison had agreed to it, though at times she wondered if they ought not to know about poor Elsie and pray for her and love her memory. Oddly enough, Donald, the eldest boy, was the

most passionately devoted to mother of all the children, and Mary was, if anything, her favorite girl, besides being more like her in appearance than was Constance, her own little girl.

Mr. Harrison's venture in the West had not turned out as well as he expected and they were very far from wealthy, still they were all very happy in their pretty little home all embowered in roses and honeysuckle. The Catholic Church was quite near and so was the Convent of the Holy Names, where the four eldest went to school and where the Nuns were all so dear, as Mary expressed it.

At the time when our story begins, Donald was eleven, Mary ten, Constance eight, dear, chubby, little Willie five, and Baby Phoebe two, and they were all well grown and merry, and as full of mischief and high spirits as healthy children ought to be. They were very pious, too, in their childish way, and the three older ones went to Holy Communion every Sunday and were proud to belong to the Confraternity of the Holy Angels. From quite little children, Mrs. Harrison had taught them to pray constantly for their father's conversion and offer little sacrifices for that intention, and they felt sure that some day, oh! what a happy day it would be! God would grant them that dearest wish of all their hearts.

If fair-haired, blue-eyed Mary was more like

her step-mother in appearance than was brown-eyed Connie, she was not at all like her in temperament, for though a sweet, lovable child, she was excitable, pleasure-loving, and given to "moods," whereas Constance was so conscientious and reliable as a little woman. She was in the third grade, and Willie in the first, and as these classes let out earlier than the other grades, she was trusted to bring her little brother home. It was amusing to see with what solicitude she did this, and to tell the truth, it was not always an easy job, for chubby-faced, round-eyed Willie was a regular boy out and out, and began to think he was far too much of a man to be bossed by a girl.

One day, as they came out of the Convent, *he* declared stoutly that he was going home by the park, because Ted White had got the loveliest pollywogs out of the pond there, and he meant to get some, too. In vain, poor Connie pleaded that it was out of their way; that mother would be anxious if they were late; that they hadn't permission to go there, and that he had nothing to put his tadpoles in. The first objections he simply ignored, but the last rather staggered him for a minute. Still, he was too determined a little fellow to be deterred by so small a difficulty. Hadn't he a pocket and two little fat hands in which to hold the pollywogs until he got

home? So off he trudged toward the pond, and was soon uttering shrieks of delight at the sight of the innumerable tadpoles of all sizes. He *must* have some of the very biggest, he declared, as he squatted down on the slippery cement edge of the pond. But catching a tadpole with your hand isn't as easy as it looks, for the squirmy little things have a way of darting off or even wriggling out between your fingers. And while Willie struggled against these difficulties that bossy Connie kept saying:

“Oh! come away, Willie! it's getting late, and you'll get your feet wet. Come away! and we'll ask Donald to get you some in a bottle.”

But Willie pretended not to hear and, just as he was stretching to get the very fattest, jolliest tadpole, his feet slid from under him and he flopped plump into the shallow pond all full of green slime and frog spawn! Fortunately, it was very shallow, and with the help of the distracted Connie he managed to scramble out, but you should just have seen the state of his little suit, clean that morning. At first he was inclined to cry, but when Connie had wiped the streaming water from his face, he exclaimed joyfully:

“I've got *one* pollywog, anyhow,” and he insisted on carrying it home in his fat, chubby hand.

But they were not at the end of their troubles,

for, just as they were beginning to cross the very dusty road, the tadpole managed to wriggle out of its captor's hand, and Willie plumped down on his knees in the road, searching for it and crying, "Oh! my pollywog! I'se lost my dear little pollywog!"

Poor Connie, who was in terror lest an automobile should come down upon them, was vainly trying to drag him away, when two beautiful collie dogs who were enjoying a grand game of tag came tearing full speed round the corner and bowled the children over like ninepins. A neighbor who was passing by laughingly helped them up, and Willie was finally led home howling dismally, "I'se lost my pollywog! I wants my pollywog!"

Mrs. Harrison cast up her hands in horror when she saw the children come in all wet and covered with mud and green slime, but she was too used to little people's ways to lose her composure for long, and after hearing the whole story, she said fervently:

"Well, all's well that ends well, and this must end in the bath tub. I thank God and Our Lady for watching over my dear children. It's a real mercy that those dogs bowled you over, my dears, for if you had stayed in the road much longer you might have been run over by an automobile. As for Willie, to teach him not to disobey his

sister again, he shall stay in bed till his suit is washed and dried, and it will be a whole week before I allow him to keep any pollywogs."

II

A BITTER HUMILIATION

It was going to be mother's birthday, and the three eldest were all excitement over the surprises they wanted to make her. Though not exactly poor, they were anything but wealthy, for Mr. Harrison's business had been going badly of late, and if his wife had not been such a careful housekeeper and such a hard-working one, they would not have been able to make ends meet. As it was, they could afford no luxuries, and though the children did not realize it, it was only by dint of constant little sacrifices and endless little economies that she managed to find the money to pay for their schooling at the convent, where the dear nuns taught them so much besides just lessons. With infinite patience they trained them in the true love of God and of the Blessed Mother, and tried to instill into their hearts the virtues of unselfishness, obedience and respect for those in authority.

Mr. Harrison had at first thought it very unnecessary his wife should go to this expense, when the children could just as well have gone

to the public schools. But when he saw the good influence the Sisters had over their characters, and how they trained them to have pretty manners as well as a strong sense of duty, he compared them in his mind with the public school children he knew, and felt that, as usual, mother had been perfectly right and that the moral training the children got at the academy was well worth the extra expense of sending them there.

Although, as I have said before, the children did not realize how many and what great sacrifices mother constantly made for them, still they *did* notice that she spent very little on herself, and that, although scrupulously neat, she scarcely ever had any of the pretty little things either to wear or to use that many of their little friends' mothers had.

So, when they put their heads together to find what they could get for her, they thought of such heaps of things that they hardly knew what to choose.

"I think what she wants most of all is a sunshade," asserted Donald. "The one she used to have is all split so she can't use it, and I've often heard her say the sun made her eyes ache."

"Oh, I wish I could give her one of those pretty little silk neck bows like Mrs. Meeker has!" exclaimed Mary; "and her gloves are so shabby, too, she's mended them and mended them. And,

oh! what she wants worst of all, I think, is a work-basket, for hers is all broken and worn, and there's nothing she uses so much. I wish I could get her one of those beauties we saw at Meyer's store the other day, all lined with silk, with cunning little pockets!"

"I bet they cost a lot, don't they?" asked Donald, knitting his brows anxiously.

"Yes, two dollars and a half, and I've only got twenty cents, but I might save a little more before mother's birthday."

"I saw a bully sunshade I know she'd like, for a dollar seventy-five, but I've only thirty-five cents," sighed Donald.

"I tell you what, Don, why shouldn't we ask daddy if we can't earn some money somehow," cried Mary, eagerly. "When he knows it's for mother, I know he'll help us. I think I'll get the work-basket."

"And I the sunshade."

"And what can I give her?" cried Constance.

"Oh, well, I think you might get her some gloves, Connie. I've seen some quite pretty silk ones for fifty cents," answered Mary, condescendingly.

When daddy was taken into their confidence he was very sympathetic. Daddy always was, and he quite approved of their plans. He soon found that he could give Donald a few little easy

jobs to do in the way of cutting wood, cleaning out the barn, helping at the store, and so forth. As for the girls, he got them to weed the garden, and stamp and gum down the envelopes of numbers of bills he was just sending out. For all these little jobs he promised to pay them a certain sum, but not enough for what they wanted to buy.

"The balance," he said, "I will give you as a reward if you bring me back really good reports from school at the end of the month."

The children were delighted, and all determined to outdo themselves in hard work and good behavior. Donald was always a good, steady pupil, but Mary was apt to have ups and downs, owing to her rather capricious nature. She was much more clever than her brother, but not nearly so fond of work, and her love of pleasure, her exuberant spirits and talkativeness often got her into trouble with dear Sister Mary Immaculata, much as she loved her teacher. Still, this month she had been fairly good so far, and she resolved in making a brilliant ending to it, so she set to studying with a will instead of reading story books up to the last minute, and often even in class. This love of reading was a perfect passion with her just now; the girls called her a reading fiend, and she was rather proud of the title, though she had been punished time and

again for bringing her story book to school, and not getting her work done in consequence. But for the sake of giving a nice present to darling mother, Mary felt she could even sacrifice her reading for a while.

All went well until just a week before the last day of the month and ten days before the mother's birthday, when, as ill-luck would have it—Mary afterwards thought Satan himself had caused this to happen—a schoolmate of hers brought her a most delightful book, declaring it was just the loveliest thing she'd ever read, and she was sure Mary would find it "heavenly." The little girl took it with rather a misgiving, and resolutely put it at the back of her desk until it was time to go home, when she packed it up with her other books. After tea, when she unbuckled her strap to start on her home lessons for the next day, the story book dropped invitingly on the table, and she thought she must just glance at the pictures; then, on turning the pages, she saw sentences that were so thrillingly exciting that she felt she *must* just read a little further and a little further, and she was horrified when all of a sudden she heard mother calling her to help get supper ready. I'm sorry to say, she answered very grumpily, did her work in an unwilling and clumsy way, and thought of nothing but getting back to her book. It was

such an exciting story, she thought she *must* finish it as soon as supper was over. It wouldn't take long, and then she'd learn her lessons.

She was within two pages of the end when mother's loving voice called, "Now, children, it's time to be off to bed," and to her horror she realized that she hadn't yet touched her school work! She begged hard for a little respite, making up a story of a difficult lesson she hadn't been able to finish, and Mrs. Harrison reluctantly gave her half an hour more, during which she dashed through a composition in the most careless fashion. Still, she hadn't had time even to look at her Catechism lesson when she finally went to bed, feeling anything but pleased with herself, and resolving to get up ever so early the next morning and learn her lesson well, for she'd always been first in Catechism, and would die of shame if she didn't know it, she said to herself. But she'd awake about six, slip on her dressing gown and sit up in bed learning that Catechism which she put under her pillow in readiness, and in this way it would be all right, she thought, as she fell asleep. The next thing she heard was:

"Why, Mary! not up yet, and it's half-past seven! Hurry up, child, for you'll hardly have time to dress and take your breakfast before you run to school."

"Oh, mother!" she cried in despair, "why didn't you wake me sooner?"

"I was busy dressing the little ones, dearie, but I did call you once and thought you'd heard me. Never mind, I think you'll be able to make it in time if you hurry," answered mother cheerfully.

Yes, but she didn't know about the unlearned Catechism lesson and the absolute necessity of getting a good report that month! Mary hurried all she could, but somehow everything went wrong—the buttons wouldn't go in the button-holes, her hair wouldn't look right, her bows went crooked, her shoe lace broke, and she was nearly in tears when she finally rushed down to breakfast, bolted her cereal and cup of cocoa, seized her luncheon box and book strap, and rushed out, even forgetting to give her mother the usual good-bye kiss. Donald had gone on ahead, that was one comfort, so, as she walked along she endeavored to learn that wretched Catechism lesson. As a rule she memorized with astonishing rapidity, but somehow that day, though she repeated the sentences over and over, they did not seem to make the slightest impression on her perturbed mind, in which the exciting story, mother's present, her monthly report, and a hundred other thoughts seemed all jumbling up together with these lines on the Sacraments

of "Extreme Unction and Ordination." Once or twice she had stumbled and almost fallen as she went along with her eyes fixed on the book, and, at last, just as she was mechanically preparing to cross the road, she was only just saved by a shout of warning from stepping right in front of an oncoming automobile. And yet, after all her efforts, she felt when she got to school that she didn't know her lesson. Catechism came first thing after prayers that day, and so she would have no further time in which to study it! Yes, she managed to put the book so that she could see it while kneeling and tried to learn it instead of following the prayers, though she felt how wrong she was.

Still, she hoped her neighbors would prompt her, or that dear Sister would notice her distress and not question her much; but what was her horror when there was a tap at the door and in came the Rector, Father Quille, accompanied by a visiting priest! Father Quille often dropped in to examine the children, and generally Mary was proud to show him how well she knew her Catechism, but this time her heart sank with a feeling of shame and despair, as they all rose to greet their visitors.

After introducing the strange priest to Sister, and chatting for a few minutes on general

topics, Father Quille turned towards the children, saying in his kindly, cheery way:

"Now we will show Father Meyer how well these little people all know their Catechism. What is the lesson for today? Oh, I see. Well, Mary Harrison, you begin 'What is the Sacrament of Extreme Unction?' "

Crimsoning up to the roots of her hair, Mary got up and endeavored to stumble through the first answer, stopped, began again, listening in anguish for a helpful prompting, then broke down completely.

"Why, how strange!" exclaimed Father Quille, "you are generally our best one at Catechism, Mary. Don't be shy, child, now give me the second answer."

But the second answer was still worse than the first, and Mary, after floundering through perfectly senseless phrases, finally burst into a passion of tears. Father Quille looked distressed, for he was fond of children, and little Mary was one of his favorites, as she had always been his star pupil in his class preparatory for First Communion two years previously.

"Why, surely, child, you can't be well! Here, don't cry; everybody must fail occasionally. Elsie Porter, give me the answer to the first question."

And Elsie Porter answered perfectly, so did

Donald, so did all the others, and the honor of Sister Immaculata's class was redeemed, so that all might have gone well and Mary's unlearned lesson would have been forgotten had it not been that she herself was so terribly upset, not only by her sorrow at the thought of the bad mark she would get, but by her shame and bitter mortification at having failed before the two priests. She hid her face in her hands and cried and sobbed hysterically till the schoolroom rang again with the sound of it, and the teachers could hardly hear what the others were saying. In vain, the Fathers spoke consolingly to her once or twice; in vain, Sister Immaculata hurried down to her and fairly besought her to be quiet, saying in a voice that trembled with her own nervousness: "I never thought you would have disgraced me like this, Mary Harrison." Nothing could stop Mary's passionate sobs, and at last Sister had to lead her out of the room until she could control herself.

How she ever got through that wretched morning, Mary never could think. Her only recollection was of her feeling of intense shame and remorse, her well nigh despair over her failure to get a good report, and her bitter mortification at the thought of what Father Quille must think of her—Father Quille, for whom she had such an intense admiration and veneration. Oh,

never, never, thought poor Mary, would she have the courage to look into his face again; never could she be happy again, now that she had so disgraced herself, her class, and even her dear Sister Mary Immaculata; for hadn't Sister herself said that she had disgraced her?

At recreation she slunk away from her schoolmates and went to practice scales on one of the most secluded pianos, her tears flowing fast all the time her fingers stumbled over the keys, with a series of discords which would have sent poor Sister Mary Anastasia wild if she could have heard them.

At last it was time to go home, and slipping away like a thief in her fear of being spoken to in private by Sister Immaculata, she ran home without waiting for Donald or a little neighbor whom she was generally supposed to look after. Even then, she was ashamed to meet her parents, ashamed to think they would hear from Donald of her fearful disgrace, and she determined on going up to her own room and hiding there for at least a few hours' respite before she had to encounter her family. Just as she turned the corner of the street, however, whom should she run up against but her own father, and as soon as he caught sight of her flushed face, her swollen eyes and deplorable expression, he stopped

abruptly and coming up to her, said as he took one of her hot hands in his:

“What is it, my little girl? Have you been naughty? Come in and tell father all about it, you’ll feel better after that.” And as he said the words he seemed to realize all of a sudden that when Catholics go to confession they, too “tell Father all about it,” and that they have still greater reason to feel better after they are forgiven by Him.

III

MARY'S ATONEMENT

WITH many tears and sobs Mary told of all her miserable experience, of her first fault in reading the book when she should have been studying, of her falsehood to her mother when she had asked for that extra half hour, of her missing her morning prayer, and then of her breakdown and disgrace when questioned on her Catechism. Mr. Harrison had taken her on his knee and put his arm around her, and while she told of her misdeeds she had hidden her face on his shoulder. When she dared to look up at last, there was no look of anger on his face, only one of sorrow, and if she had but known it, he was thinking how like the child's character was to that of her poor mother. Sweet, loving, good in a way, but overfond of pleasure and admiration, and lacking in self-control.

"Yes, it has been a bad business, dear, and I am ever so sorry my little girl should have so disgraced herself," he answered gently, as he stroked back her tangled curls. "All that there is to do now, Mary, is to make up for the past

by doing much better in the future. To begin with, you had better tell mother all about it."

"Oh, but the secret," cried Mary, "and I tried so hard until I got that wretched book."

"You needn't mention the secret at all. You would have had just cause to be grieved and ashamed of your conduct, even if there had been nothing to win by your good marks. Then that book is what I want to talk to you about. Reading is a very innocent thing in itself, or at least it *may* be very innocent, and it may be one of the worst things on earth."

Mary looked up, her eyes wide with astonishment.

"Yes, but you are too young to understand all the evil it can cause. Still, you see by today's experience what trouble it may get you into. Whenever you are so engrossed with your reading that it makes you neglect your duties; whenever you can't put down your book cheerfully and quickly when you are called or feel you ought to be doing something else, *then* reading is distinctly *bad*, however good the book may be in itself. A love of reading thus over-indulged becomes a sinful passion like drink or gambling, or any other thing in which we act against our conscience and lose control over ourselves. You will have to struggle hard to conquer this over-excessive love of reading, and you must begin

doing so now, while you are still a little girl. I cannot, of course, give you the last dollar you need as a reward for your good report this month. You have lost that, but you can win the dollar if you are brave enough to do three things."

"Three things! It's like in fairy tales, isn't it? What are they, daddy?" answered Mary, rather anxiously.

"They are all things that will cost you a great deal of effort and strength of will to do, and it is this strength of will that I am especially anxious to teach you to have. First, you will give me that book and promise me upon your honor not to open a story book till after mother's birthday. Secondly, you will go before supper to Father Quille and confess to him frankly how it was you so disgraced your class." Mary crimsoned and the tears started to her eyes. "Thirdly," added her father in a very firm yet kindly voice, "tomorrow morning you will apologize to Sister Immaculata for your behavior."

"Oh, daddy! Oh, I can't, I can't!" sobbed Mary.

"I'm sorry, then, for I see you have very little real courage, Mary, and in that case you will have to do without your dollar and mother won't get her work-basket. I thought you loved her enough to sacrifice your pride in order to give

her pleasure. Anyhow, go and tell her everything now, my little girl."

And with a kiss and rather a sad sigh, he put her down and went out of the house, while Mary slowly made her way to mother's room and there sobbed out all her sad story with many expressions of regret.

Mother was even more gentle and sympathetic than father had been, but she, too, seemed anxious and especially distressed to think Mary should have told her an untruth about her lesson and have wilfully neglected saying her prayers.

"Who knows if, instead of doing that, you had prayed like a good girl and asked Our Lady to obtain your forgiveness and help you through with your lesson, perhaps she would have done so, and all this would not have happened," she said gently. "Besides, dearest, instead of sinning by telling me an untruth last night, why didn't you own up to your fault? Then I would most certainly have called you in time for you to do your lesson and would have helped you learn it, if necessary. Never mistrust mother and mother's love, dear! Has it ever failed you when you have confided in me?"

"Oh, no, no, mother! you are always so dear to me, but oh! father wants me to do three things, and I can't, I just can't do them all." And then

she told of what Mr. Harrison desired her to do.

"I know they will seem hard to you," said mother, pressing the child more tenderly to her breast, "but, dear, couldn't you do them for the love of Jesus? Think of all He suffered for you!"

Mary hung her head and sobbed.

"And then, Mary, dear, you might also offer them up as a sacrifice for your dear father's conversion. You know how we have all longed and prayed for it. Remember how sad it is for him not to have our beautiful faith, which would so help him in his many trials and difficulties. Poor, kind, patient father! Think how lovely it would be to have him come to Church with us and go to the Sacraments and be an earnest, zealous Catholic, as I'm sure he would be. Out of love for Jesus and for father's sake can't you make the effort, dearest?"

Mary looked up with streaming eyes, then kissing her mother passionately, she murmured:

"I hadn't thought of all that—for Jesus, and father, and you, mother, I'll try to do all three things."

When father came home he found the story book lying on his dresser and heard that Mary had gone out to see Father Quille. Poor little Mary! how her heart did thump, to be sure, when she got to the Rectory and rang the bell! And

still more so when the rather severe looking house-keeper opened the door and seemed almost scornful to think of such a small person having the pretension of disturbing "Father," especially when he had a visitor. However, Mary stammered that *her* father, Mr. Harrison, had sent her to tell Father Quille something "very particular." So, rather reluctantly, the lady led her into the parlor, where she sat on the very edge of a rather high chair, looking the picture of misery. Have you ever sat at the dentist's waiting for your turn, with the pleasant prospect of having a tooth out? Well, then you can have some faint idea of what Mary went through while she waited in the Rectory parlor, thinking every minute that she really must slip out and run away. Still she stayed, for what seemed to her hours, until she heard the well-known firm step, and Father Quille came in, saying in his usual kindly way: "Well, little Mary, and what is your message, my child?"

"It—it isn't a message, but father sent me to tell you all about why I was so naughty this morning," gasped Mary, looking like a criminal waiting to be executed. Then, encouraged by his kind words and genial smile, she poured out her whole story, with great trouble keeping back her tears.

"Your father and mother were both quite

right," he answered in his grave, gentle manner. "It is true that the love of reading, though it may be a very good thing in moderation, can also be one of the greatest dangers to the soul, and if, as your mother said, you had stopped to pray for help when you felt you were doing wrong, or had even said your usual prayers attentively, I have no doubt the greater part of all this would never have happened. Then, too, when you had failed to answer me, your fit of crying was brought on chiefly by wounded pride, so that your father was very wise to give you some humiliating things to do as your punishment. I am glad that the thought of doing them for the love of Jesus and as an offering for your father's conversion has enabled you to perform your penance gravely, so far that quite makes amends for the faults you committed, and I feel sure it has given pleasure to Our Lord's Sacred Heart. Now come with me to the Church; I will give you absolution, and tomorrow you can go to Holy Communion. Then, when you have the dear Jesus in your heart, you will have the strength to do the last part of your penance. Don't be afraid, little one," he added, laying his hand caressingly on her shoulder, "it won't be as hard as you think."

And after hearing her confession and giving her absolution, he knelt for a while before the

Tabernacle with her, and then took her into the Rectory again and gave her a beautiful holy picture of Our Lord carrying His Cross. He even kept her for a few minutes longer to chat cheerily about Donald and Constance and the babies.

Altogether, he was so kind, so fatherly, so comforting, that in spite of the ordeal Mary skipped for joy as she ran home after her interview.

Her father noticed the look of peace and happiness in the child's face as she came in and he said with a smile, "Well, Mary, Father Quille wasn't so very terrible after all, was he?"

"Oh, no, daddy, he was just as dear as he could be, and he gave me absolution and told me I might go to Holy Communion tomorrow, and he'd pray for me at his mass, and oh! one does feel so lovely when one has been to confession and told God everything!"

"It's like telling father and mother everything, only more so, isn't it?" he answered with a rather embarrassed laugh. "Yes, I can understand how relieved one must feel after it. I'm very glad you went, dear, and I am really happy to see you have some courage when you make the effort."

The little girl had feared that Donald would tease or reproach her for her conduct that morn-

ing, but, on the contrary, he was quite affectionate and never alluded to the matter in any way. So, after all, when Mary went to bed that night, after saying her prayers, she was feeling far happier than she could have believed possible in the earlier part of the day.

The next morning mother woke her early, and with a loving kiss and a murmured "Pray hard for us all, dear, and especially for father's conversion," she sent the child off to Mass, and when Mary came back looking half tearful, though happy, she found a dainty breakfast awaiting her, and both father and mother gave her a specially loving kiss when she left for school, accompanied by Donald and Constance who chatted merrily to her all the way. But oh! when she got within sight of the convent how her heart did beat. She grew now pale, now red, and good-hearted Donald noticed it and murmured in a gruff though hearty way:

"Don't be scared, kid, you'll be all right."

Poor Mary! she felt anything but all right as she took her place in the ranks and, to the sound of a lively march, walked into the schoolroom and up to her place. Then came prayers, and never, perhaps, had she more earnestly prayed for help. The minute they were over she sprang to her feet and going quickly up to Sister's desk she said in a gasping voice:

"May—may I speak to you, Sister?"

"Certainly, dear," answered Sister, kindly.

Poor Mary could hear her heart thumping, and she felt at first as if the words *wouldn't* come. Then at last she burst out:

"Please, Sister, I want to beg your pardon—for having—been so naughty, and—having disgraced you yesterday."

"Well, I *was* sorry and disappointed in you, Mary, but I quite forgive you, dear. I don't think you could have been well," said Sister, taking one of the small cold hands in hers.

"It wasn't that," panted Mary, getting redder and redder. "I'd spent my time reading a story when I ought to have been preparing my lessons." In spite of her, she stopped with a sob and had to brush the tears from her eyes.

"That was bad, but I'm sure you won't do it again. We'll forget all about it, Mary," answered Sister, kindly.

"I apologize," she repeated with a break in her voice, then hurriedly, in a dazed sort of way, she began making her way back to her seat. As she passed her brother, however, he leaned towards her and said in a loud whisper:

"Bravo, kiddy! it was real plucky of you to do that. You showed your grit and I'm proud of you." And then, they never knew who began

it, but the whole class started clapping her, and Mary sat down again with her eyes full of tears but her heart full of joy and gratitude.

IV

THE CRIMSON SUNSHADE

“MOTHER! mustn’t it be dreadful to have a stepmother!” exclaimed Mary a few days later, while preparing for school. “There are some children at the convent that have one, and they say she’s ever so unkind to them but pets *her* children like everything.”

“She must be a very unfair, unkind woman then,” answered Mrs. Harrison, “but I know many stepmothers who love their stepchildren just as they do their own. There’s Mrs. Maloney, for instance.”

“Are some of them her stepchildren? I thought she was their really and truly mother. Still it can’t be the same thing! Oh, mother, darling!” she added, throwing her arms around Mrs. Harrison’s neck, “if you were to die and we had a stepmother I’d *hate* her.”

“That would be very foolish and very wrong, too, dear, for we Catholics have no right to hate anybody. But now, don’t think of such things, but run away to school or you’ll be late.”

Mrs. Harrison watched the children go with a sinking heart, as she wondered whether her little Mary would continue to love her as she did now, when she discovered the truth, as she must inevitably do some day. She had looked so fierce when she spoke of hating her stepmother! Yet surely she could never hate *her*, who had always loved her so dearly and done all she possibly could for her! A feeling of dread and foreboding seemed to grip at her motherly heart, and it was not until she had knelt long in tearful prayer before her crucifix that she recovered some degree of peace.

On the eve of her birthday, Mr. Harrison saw the school reports added up the amounts earned by each child, and gave them the money he had promised. Indeed, to Donald, whose report, especially for conduct and application, was perfect, he gave three whole dollars, and to little Constance, whose marks were equally good, he gave a dollar instead of fifty cents he had promised.

"I am delighted to see," he said with a smile, "how earnestly you have striven to do better than usual for your dear mother's sake. I know that Mary has tried hard, too, on the whole, though she did have one failure, therefore, though I can't give her the reward for her report card, I am glad to say she has earned it in another and perhaps more difficult way. And now, my

dears, you can go and do your shopping. But mind and have it quite understood that you expect to be able to exchange the things if they prove unsatisfactory, when you get them home, and then let me see them at once so that you can have time to go back with them if I do not think they are just what mother would like."

After some discussion the children decided that Mary and Constance should take little Willie with them and do their shopping together, while Donald went to do his choosing by himself.

Dear, dear! how important the little people did feel, especially Connie, with a fine crisp dollar bill and fifteen cents in her little purse. Never did she remember having had as much.

"Do you think I'd better buy both, a pair of gloves and a tie, for mother?" she asked Mary, as they hurried along, "or shall I spend all the money on the gloves?"

"Well, it would be lovely to see mother with a pretty neck bow, wouldn't it?" answered Mary. "She so seldom has pretty things!"

"She gives all the pretty things to us, doesn't she?" said Constance, as she skipped along in her delight. "Don't you think we've got just the dearest mother in the world, Mary?"

"Of *course* we have," assented Mary, emphatically, "but now let's think about what we're

going to buy. Here's the store. We'll look at the work-baskets first."

She had no trouble in selecting *her* present, for one day when she had been out with her mother they had seen it in the shop window, and Mrs. Harrison had much admired the soft moss green tint of the lining and the convenient shape of the basket. So that was soon settled.

Next came the choosing of Connie's gift, and that was not so easy. She had been looking with longing and admiration at a beautiful pair of best quality silk gloves at a dollar, when the sales-lady brought forward some lovely tan shades of kid gloves, a special bargain, being sold that day for a dollar and a quarter.

"Oh, buy those, Connie! They'll be just splendid for mother," cried Mary rapturously. "I've got ten cents left and I'll give them to you to make up the quarter."

The little girls were delighted and the gloves had been chosen, powdered, and were going to be wrapped up, when chubby-faced Willie exclaimed anxiously, "And what am I doing to dive to muvver?"

Poor wee Willie! True, they never thought of him, and yet he could not be allowed to be distressed by being left out of the present-giving. Already his blue eyes were filling with tears at the thought, and the little girls couldn't bear

to see him disappointed, so, though it was rather hard to have to give up those beautiful kid gloves, good-hearted Connie decided to take the silk ones, and with their remaining quarter they finally bought a pretty, tasteful mauve neck bow which the saleslady very obligingly put into a pretty box and wrapped in tissue paper, making it look much more important.

But if Connie had had to make a little sacrifice, that was nothing to the adventures that befell poor Donald. To begin with, as he was hastening eagerly towards the umbrella maker's where he had seen the tempting sunshades, he made a short cut through a rather lonely alley, and there, with his head bowed down upon some empty packing cases, was a boy of about his own age sobbing as if his heart would break.

"Hullo, kid! Anything the matter?" he inquired boy fashion.

The child looked up, a poor, puny-faced, half-starved looking little fellow, whom he recognized as one of his schoolmates, one of the numerous ones (though none of the other children knew it) whom kind Sister Superior not only educated for nothing, but often helped with food and clothing.

"Why, Bob! is that you? What's up, kiddo?" he asked, more anxiously, as he looked at the

blanched face of his comrade, which was fairly quivering with distress.

For a few minutes Bob couldn't speak; two or three times he attempted to do so, but broke down into a despairing sob. At last he gasped:

"I've lost a whole dollar; they'll think I stole it! I daren't go back!"

"Go back where? Home? Why, whose money was it? Your mother's?"

"Oh, no! Wish it had been! It was the boss' money. I'd just got a job carrying goods ter customers and this was my first day, and I had ter go far and they paid me a dollar. Then I thought I'd make a cut through that there park, and just as I was gittin' back to the store I puts my hand in my pocket and the dollar ain't there, and I went all the ways back and looked and looked and couldn't find it, though I prayed hard to St. Anthony," he added, breaking down again.

"Are you sure you didn't put it in another pocket?"

"Oh, yes; I've looked and looked! There was a big hole in me pocket, see! And, oh dear; they're sure to give me the sack, or maybe send for the cop, and what will mother say! I wanted so bad to help her, and we was that glad I'd got a job, and now the very first day!"

“Couldn’t your mother lend you the dollar till you can earn it back?”

“Mother! Why, this morning she says to me, says she ‘Bob, you’ll have to make shift with this bit of bread, for I ain’t got nothing but a dime in the house and that’s got to get the whole day’s meals for yer all,’ ” and Bob again dropped his head on the packing cases, his whole frame shaking with sobs.

Donald hesitated. His father had given him the money to spend for mother, but then he had *earned it*, and besides, he was too good-hearted a boy to leave a comrade in such distress, especially as he knew how woefully poor his school-mate’s family was, with a sick father, a sadly overworked mother, and five children, of whom Bob was the oldest. So with a deep sigh of regret Donald opened his purse and taking out one of his hard-earned dollars he handed it to the boy, saying:

“Here! cheer up, old fellow; I can let you have a dollar, only don’t tell anybody, and hurry off with it to your boss, else he’ll wonder what you’re about.”

“Oh, can you let me have it, really! Ain’t you good, though! I don’t know how ter thank yer! But sure I’ll pay yer back some day. It must have been Our Lady as sent you to me! My! but ain’t you rich!”

"Oh, we're not rich," answered Donald, blushing, "but I've been saving up to buy mother a birthday present."

"And you spared me all this out of it? You *are* a brick. Wish I could do something for yer," he added gratefully as he turned to go.

"You can pray for my intention," called Donald, who was very anxious for his father's conversion.

Both boys hurried off in different directions, and Donald soon arrived at the umbrella shop. There he was fairly dazed with all the varieties of beautiful colors he had to choose from. To be sure, he was now limited as to price, but still among the cheaper sunshades there were very brilliant ones, and Donald's love of bright colors was a joke in the family. Among them was a fearful scarlet parasol with an orange border that took his fancy very much, until he remembered the fate of a red and orange tie he had once bought. Then he was smitten with a vivid green one with mother-of-pearl handle, after which, remembering his mother's love for quiet colors, he nearly bought a pretty pale mauve one, but was advised by the salesman not to do so.

"These mauves are all very well if the lady buys a sunshade every few weeks, one for each

dress, but they don't last no time; they fade that quick."

"Oh! I don't think mother has bought a new sunshade since Connie was born, and she's seven," he blurted out, then blushed to have revealed the family poverty.

At last the umbrella maker brought out a parasol that so dazzled the delighted Donald, that he forgot all about mother's likings and decided upon it at once. It was of the most vehement, almost offensive shade of magenta crimson and had a very long gilt handle. Altogether it was by far the "loudest" thing in the shop, and it cost a dollar seventy-five. After having paid for it, Donald had just ten cents left, and these he resolved upon spending on chocolate creams for Willie to give. He had had the sunshade wrapped up, and finding it rather awkward to carry, he was holding it against his shoulder like a gun, when on his way to the candy store he met a pretty fair-haired little girl, accompanied by a small but beautiful long-haired terrier with great soft brown eyes. He looked up at Donald in a friendly way as he passed and wagged his tail when the boy spoke to him.

"Isn't he a dear?" said the little girl with a smile, evidently proud her favorite should be noticed.

They had hardly passed him when Donald heard a fierce, loud growl, followed by piercing screams and howls, and, turning around, saw that a great bulldog had rushed upon the poor little terrier and was rolling him over and over, while his pretty mistress shrieked with fright and distress. Forgetting everything for the time except his anxiety to protect the little dog and its owner, Donald flew back and began belaboring the great brute of a bulldog with his precious sunshade, which he used so vigorously that the big dog beat a hasty retreat, while the little one scrambled up again and rushed into his little mistress' extended arms.

"Oh, you are a dear, brave boy! Thank you so much for saving my dear Frisky!" she exclaimed with tears of gratitude in her pretty blue eyes. "That great dog would have killed him if it hadn't been for you!"

Donald felt a happy glow within him at the thought of having been able to do two deeds of kindness on his way, but somehow as he walked along he began to have misgivings about his sunshade. He couldn't exactly picture mother as using such a showy thing. Just before reaching home he met the two girls and Willie, all very triumphant over their purchases, and together they went in to Mr. Harrison's study.

Mary and Constance's gifts were duly seen and approved of. Then their father said to Donald:

"Now, my lad, let's see your present. I hope you chose a quiet colored——. My stars! but that's a blazer!" he exclaimed with a laugh, as the boy unwrapped the sunshade. Then seeing the look of disappointment on the child's face, he added: "I'm afraid, Don, it would be a very trying color for your mother's weak eyes, and the handle doesn't look a convenient one. Let me see it close."

Then, to their horror, as he went to open it, the handle came out into his hand.

"Why, Donald! what's this?" he cried. "They must have sold you a damaged parasol."

"It was all right in the store," stammered Donald, the tears starting to his eyes. "And, oh! when I think of it, I must have broken it when I hit the dog, and now, after all, I'll have no present for mother!" he added, bursting into tears.

V.

A JOYFUL DAY

DONALD was a boy who prided himself on being manly, so he hardly ever cried and his sisters were so distressed at seeing his grief that they both rushed to him, saying: "Never mind, Don; you can give *our* things to mother; we'll just give them from us all."

Donald was more touched than he cared to show, but his father said kindly: "I don't think there will be any need for that. It is only the stick that is broken and that can easily be repaired, so I'll go to the store with you and see what can be done. But, my dear boy, what in the world made you beat a dog with your precious gift?"

Brushing back his tears, Donald gave a thrilling account of the bulldog's attack, and of the little girl's fright and gratitude, and his sisters exclaimed as he had done that, he was a dear, brave boy.

"I see — I understand," said Mr. Harrison. "Well, my lad, I'm glad you were able to save the little girl's pet, though, of course, it's annoy-

ing about the sunshade. I expect you'll have to pay for the repairs before the man will exchange it, but, as I see, it only cost \$1.75, so you must still have some money left. Why did you choose such a cheap one when you had plenty of money? Surely, nothing was too much to spend for mother! How much have you left?"

"Nothing; I—I spent my last ten cents on candy for Willie to give. I didn't think he had anything," stammered Donald, reddening up to the roots of his hair.

"Well, but what about your other dollar? Did you lose it or spend it on yourself? I insist upon knowing, Don."

Poor Donald! He wasn't ashamed of what he had done, still he was half shy of telling it, but when he finally blurted out the whole story, his father grasped his hand heartily, saying in a moved voice:

"Quite right, my boy; it was noble of you to do it and I'm sure mother will prize the knowledge of your charity to your schoolmate more than she would have done the finest sunshade in the world; but now, don't look so distressed. Come with me and we will see what arrangement we can make about your present. You certainly have had an afternoon of adventure!"

When they arrived at the store, the umbrella maker began by making great difficulties as to

changing an article which had been damaged, and he and Mr. Harrison had been arguing about it for some minutes when a little dog came running into the shop, and Donald exclaimed:

"Why, that's the wee doggie I saved by breaking the sunshade!"

"Were you the boy that saved my little girl's Frisky from that fierce bulldog of Mr. Brown's?" exclaimed the umbrella maker. "I'm real gratified to you then, for that great brute of a bull might have killed my little girl's pet and hurt the child, too. I'll have Mr. Brown prosecuted if he lets that dog of his out again. He isn't safe."

"Yes, it was on that fierce dog's back that my lad broke his sunshade," said Mr. Harrison with a laugh.

"Then sure he may change it for any other he likes in the store and I won't charge him anything for the repairs neither," cried the umbrella maker.

So to Donald's infinite relief they were able to choose a fine sunshade of a pretty shade of soft dark green, with a sensible natural wood handle that Mr. Harrison said he was sure his wife would like. It was a far more expensive one, but the man would not hear of their paying any more for it.

"No, no," he said with a laugh, "you may con-

sider that a present from grateful Frisky."

At last the longed-for day arrived, and to make it more perfect it happened to be Saturday, so that they were able to enjoy the whole day with mother, and they had arranged with their father that they would give their presents at breakfast. Before that, however, the three eldest had got up real early to go to the first Mass with Mrs. Harrison and offer up their Communion for her. This proof of their love had made her very happy, and it was with hearts beating with unusual fervor and joy that they all hurried back to get breakfast. Then they found that dear, kind daddy had been beforehand with them, for he had not only dressed the little ones, but laid the cloth, cooked the meal and brought down all the presents. Oh! how delighted all the children were to give them! All the more so, that in almost every case they had been earned at the expense of some trouble and sacrifice. Mrs. Harrison was charmed with them all, and touched almost to tears when she heard of all the children's efforts and adventures. She pressed Mary and Donald to her heart with special tenderness and praised Connie, too, for her unselfish kindness to her little brother.

"As it happens," she said, "I am delighted you did it in more ways than one, dear, for in this warm climate I far prefer silk gloves to kid

ones. I have only been wearing the old kid ones because I had no others, and this sunshade is just what I wanted, and so is the beautiful work-basket, and, Willie, darling, mother likes your pretty tie so much."

"And now I will offer my humble gift," said Mr. Harrison with a smile, "and I hope it will give you as much pleasure as the children's, mother," and he handed her a rather bulky parcel which was found to contain a pretty, dark brown tailor-made suit, at the sight of which all the children danced for joy, exclaiming:

"Won't it be just lovely to see mother in a nice new dress, and won't she look pretty in it, dad?"

"There is something in the jacket pocket," half-whispered Mr. Harrison in answer to his wife's heartfelt thanks, and with beating heart she pulled out a slip of paper on which she read this message:

"As I know nothing could give you greater happiness, my dear wife, I promise henceforth to accompany you to Mass of a Sunday and to inquire further into the beautiful religion that makes you such a perfect wife and mother.

"Your James."

"Oh, James," cried Mrs. Harrison, as she fell into his arms, her eyes full of tears and joy,

“nothing could have given me such happiness; you are right about that. Oh, it is so dear of you. I am so grateful, so delighted!” And when, later on in the day, she told the children of their father’s promise, she added, as she kissed Mary tenderly: “Who knows if my little girl’s sacrifice of the other day, so lovingly offered for her father’s conversion, has not procured us all this great blessing and joy?”

After the giving of the presents, they sat down to partake of daddy’s breakfast, and it was such a festive one—eggs and bacon, toasted corn flakes, and flapjacks with maple syrup, with strawberries and cream as a wind-up! Willie asked: “Can’t it be buffdays evelly day?” and though they all laughed about it, the children very much wished it could.

Then, just as they had finished up helping mother wash the dishes, they had another delightful surprise, for daddy drove up to the door with the big business auto and they were told he was going to take them all on a picnic out in the country. Mother knew of it beforehand and had prepared a nice luncheon to take with them, and the children all shrieked and danced in their excitement. Just as they were getting ready to start mother said gently:

“Don’t you think, dears, as we are going to have such a lovely day ourselves, it would be

only right to try and give a little pleasure to some poor people who have a very hard time?"

"Oh, yes, mother! We'd love to," they all cried in chorus. "What can we do?"

"Well, I've put together some of the things that were left from breakfast, and added a few other eatables and some nice oranges and a pot of jam, and I thought it would be a good idea to take them to Bob's people. Think of seven of them only having had a dime's worth of food between them yesterday!"

"Wasn't it dreadful," cried Mary, "and the children have no toys, nothing, scarcely any clothes."

"Well, we haven't very much and we mustn't keep father waiting, but if each one of you could find some little thing to take for one of the children, we might leave a ray of sunshine in that dreary home on our way to the picnic."

A few minutes later the children came running down with gifts for the Murphy's. Donald had one of his favorite story books, a most thrilling tale of adventures, for Bob. Mary had a fair-sized doll, which, if a little shabby, still had her charms in spite of having lost a foot. Constance had a small darky doll and a rather dilapidated picture book, and Willie was triumphantly carrying an old wooden horse, which had lost both tail and mane and one eye, but was

still, in his eyes, a very precious and lovable object. And, oh! if you could have seen the joy of the poor household when their auto stopped at the door and they brought in their humble gifts! As to poor Mrs. Murphy, she was so overcome with thankfulness at the sight of the food that after a few fervent and incoherent words of thanks, she fell into a chair, covered her face in her hands and sobbed for joy. Then when she could recover herself sufficiently to speak, she told Mrs. Harrison that she hadn't a scrap of food or a cent of money in the house that morning, and that though she felt she *must* trust in God's love and that of His Blessed Mother, it had seemed as if her prayers for help would bring no answer, until they came driving up to the door, "and sure you was God's messengers a-bringin' of us help in our distriss," she added gratefully.

The children were overjoyed with their toys, the poor sick father smiled to see their pleasure, and altogether when the Harrisons left, it was with the feeling that there is no joy on earth to be compared to that of helping our poorer brethren. Then they had a glorious drive past orange and lemon orchards, laden with golden fruit and balmy with the scent of the rose hedges, while ahead of them the long ridge of the Sierra Mountains was of all shades of blues and pur-

ples, and all around them the birds sang exultantly, as if they, too, felt that this was indeed a happy, beautiful world.

After driving along for a considerable time they began to go up the mountain side, and at times the road seemed so narrow and ran so close to the edge of a precipice that Mrs. Harrison fairly held her breath, but was much relieved when they stopped at the opening of a beautiful canyon. Her husband told them all to jump out and each one take part of the luncheon things, as they were going to walk the rest of the way. He backed the machine into a safe place, chained and padlocked it to be safe against joy riders, and then they all started up the beautiful little valley with its steep mountain sides rising on each side of them, covered with a dense growth of grand old trees and sage, and other bushes which gave out a delicious spicy odor. At the bottom of the canyon leaped and gurgled a clear little mountain stream, making here and there regular little waterfalls as it fell down great boulders of granite, or sending up a shower of spray as it dashed against impeding rocks. Everywhere around there was a profusion of wild flowers of every color — tall scarlet larkspurs, yellow monkey flowers, white pearly everlasting, and occasionally beautiful Mariposa

poppies with their exquisite crinkly white petals and deep golden centers.

Then came the excitement of fording the stream, which was pretty wide just there. There were a fair number of good-sized boulders which, though wet from the spray, were really out of the water, and these served as stepping stones. Willie, who had insisted on carrying something, had been entrusted with the box of sandwiches, and when his father wanted to help him over the stream he refused, scornfully saying: "Me big boy, me zump just like Donald," but, his legs were shorter, his aim less sure and once more he slipped plump into the water with a tremendous splash that drenched both Connie and their mother, who were just near him.

"Oh! the sandwiches! Save the sandwiches!" cried Donald, while tender-hearted Connie screamed: "Oh! our Willie will be drowned! Save him, save him!"

In an instant, Mr. Harrison had picked up the child, who was unhurt, but not a little frightened and roaring lustily, until mother said cheerily: "Why, Willie, did you try to catch another pollywog!" at which recollection his tears turned to laughter. While his parents were doing their best to wring out his clothes, Donald rescued the sandwiches, which were beginning to float down the stream. Fortunately they were in a stout

shoe box and its moisture was only just sufficient to keep them nice and fresh, Mrs. Harrison declared. As for Willie, it was so warm and his little summer suit was so light that it soon dried in the sun, and when once he had got over his fright he thought the adventure rather amusing. After they had wandered about for an hour or two picking wild flowers, getting roots of ferns and lilies for mother's garden and enjoying everything, they began to set out the things for the lunch in a delightful spot by the side of the rippling water. Mr. Harrison had been carrying a fair-sized tin bucket in which were packed a bottle of lemon juice, a piece of ice and a goodly packet of sugar. After taking these out, he partly filled the bucket with the sparkling mountain water and made the most delicious lemonade, while Mary and her mother spread the luncheon out on a large tablecloth. Donald arranged rugs all around for them to sit on, and Connie and Willie sat on a grassy mound at some little distance watching a pair of wood thrushes feeding their young in a nest.

All of a sudden the two children began to utter the most piercing shrieks of: "A snake! A snake! He'll kill them. Help! daddy, mother, help!"

Everybody rushed to their assistance in alarm, and, to say the truth, poor Mrs. Harrison's knees

shook under her at the thought that she would perhaps find one of her darlings struck by a deadly rattlesnake. On reaching them, however, they discovered that it was only one of the brilliantly colored king snakes, splendid with his stripes of yellow and black, who had crawled up the tree and was just devouring one of the young birds, while the others crouched in terror at the bottom of the nest and the parent birds circled around their deadly enemy uttering cries of anguish. Quick as thought, Donald seized a sharp stone and flung it at the snake, which, with lightninglike rapidity, slipped down the tree trunk and disappeared in the underbrush, while the parent birds flew down on the nest with chirps of delight.

It was some time before the whole Harrison family recovered from this scare, and the creepy, crawly feeling the sight of the cruel snake had given them, though daddy assured them he was perfectly harmless to human beings. At last, when they had seen the parent thrushes feeding their young once more, the children were comforted and all started to go back to the luncheon. Suddenly Donald, who was running on ahead, gave an exclamation of horror, followed by a peal of laughter, crying:

“Look, mother, look! It’s too funny!” and hurrying forward they saw a party of squirrels

which had taken possession of the luncheon table, and were having a high time. One was sitting up on his haunches holding a small doughnut in his front paws and evidently enjoying it hugely, another was sampling the sandwiches, while others were partaking of strawberries, nuts and bread, and the little thieves looked too cunning for anything with their bushy tails standing up like great plumes behind their heads, while their bright, beady eyes sparkled with enjoyment. Mr. Harrison clapped his hands and gave a shout, and they all disappeared as if by magic, while the children ran forward in some consternation to see if there was anything left for them. Yes, thank goodness! there was plenty, so much indeed, that when, after a short time, the squirrels and chipmunks came running up towards them, as if to ask for their share, the picnickers threw them piece after piece, until they grew so bold as to come and take food out of the children's hands. The Harrisons were so delighted with the pretty creatures that they quite forgot the incident about the snake, and when they finally drove home towards evening, they all declared that they had never in all their lives had a more perfectly happy day.

VI

THE CHURCH TOWER

THE Harrison children were all pleasant, cheery tempered and sociable, so they had many friends among their schoolfellows and neighbors; indeed, Mary was inclined to be almost too universal in her friendships and to associate with children who were her inferiors both as to breeding and manners. Donald, however, had fewer friends, but these he chose carefully, and they became fast chums, so much so that many remained faithful to him all through life. Among his most intimate ones were two boys, very unlike in character—Eugene Walsh, a merry, rollicking little fellow, plucky and fond of adventures of all kinds; and Philip, a quiet, studious, rather nervous lad, whom the other two teased not a little for what they called his sissy ways, though they really liked him ever so much. These three were altar boys, and not a little proud of it, too, for Father Quille was very particular as to the behavior of those he admitted to this honor, and Sister Mary Regina, who trained them all, was prompt at expelling any who were

careless or showed themselves unworthy in any way.

The church was a pretty stone building, for the most part densely covered with climbing vines which added greatly to its picturesque appearance and completely covered its tall, square bell tower. This tower, with its four windows, was the much-loved haunt of numbers of snowy white pigeons, which added a touch of beauty to the sacred edifice, and reminded one of the doves so often portrayed in the catacombs and churches of old as emblems of peace and love.

The Harrisons lived on the outskirts of the town and had a fair-sized garden, in which the children were allowed to have many pets. Donald had rabbits, Constance guinea pigs, and Mary had a little bantam rooster, with a tremendously loud, shrill crow, and three cunning little hens who laid real eggs which, if they were rather small, were very delicious all the same. Pretty often these were sold for sittings of eggs or the little hens were allowed to bring up a little brood, and most charming the wee energetic baby chicks certainly were. Still, there were times when Mary had some eggs to spare, and these were given, with much joy, to father or mother, or Connie, or one of her brothers as a great treat.

Donald did occasionally sacrifice one of his beloved bunnies for the family table, but they

were so tame and it grieved him so much to have them killed that he generally managed to sell them or give them away when they became too numerous. After a time, he began to wish he could have some pretty white pigeons like those around the church, and one day he screwed up his courage to ask Father Quille if he would give him a pair.

"Well, I think it would be rather difficult to catch them," answered Father, kindly, "but there are plenty of nests in the tower, and if you get the Sacristan to let you in some evening, you can catch either young or adults when they have gone to roost. You may take as many as you like, for we have more than we need about the place." Then the good priest went off on a sick call and forgot all about the boy and the pigeons.

Donald rushed home in great excitement that day to tell his parents of Father Quille's permission, and asked if he might keep some doves, as he called them.

"Well, yes," answered Mrs. Harrison; "I see no harm in it, my boy; but they will be some expense to you for food, and a good deal of trouble besides, for you will have to build a dovecote for them first, and then it will need cleaning out frequently."

"Oh, I won't mind that, daddy. I'd love to

do it, and then I could often give mother some of the squabs, and I know you love squab pie, don't you, dad?"

"Yes, but if we don't get more of them than we do of your rabbits, Don, I don't think I will get fat on squab pie," laughed his father. "Still, you may keep pigeons, my boy; only, before you get them, you must build a proper dovecote for them at the bottom of the garden. I'll tell you how to set about it."

Donald was delighted, and for several weeks he worked at it after school and on Saturdays, with the frequent help of Eugene and Philip. It took longer than they had thought it would to finish, but at last Mr. Harrison declared it was quite all right and a very creditable piece of work for three such young boys, and the next thing was to get the pigeons. It was now late summer, and, though the weather was still very warm, the days were short and it became dusk some time before the Sacristan closed the church. This the boys determined would be the best time to catch their birds, so one evening they warned the old man of what they were going to do, so that he might not lock them up in the church. He was a queer, rather grumpy old fellow, though really very good-hearted, and he hated to think of any of what he called *his* birds being taken by "them rascals of boys." Still, when

told Father Quille had given permission, he couldn't well refuse, so he thought he'd go off and do some errands while they were about it, and in that way he'd avoid seeing any of his beloved doves being injured or distressed.

The church was empty, the stairway up to the tower dark and steep, and so each boy had provided himself with a good-sized lantern, and to the great amusement of his comrades, Philip came solemnly carrying a large red one, such as is used as a warning when a part of the street is under repair. Up the steep stairs the three crept as quietly as they could so as not to scare the birds, and before entering the tower they shaded their lanterns with their hands. Hardly had they gone in, however, when the birds, who were not yet really settled for the night, began fluttering about, beating against the walls, almost flying in the boys' faces and altogether creating quite a scene of confusion.

"See! Here are some nests; we might as well take some of the squabs," cried Eugene.

"They are too small; I shouldn't know how to feed them," objected Donald. "Let's look further on." And the three boys wandered around, discussing and hesitating, while waving their lanterns over their heads the better to see the nests, and the pigeons flew in and out of the windows

in their alarm, like white ghosts in the now darkening night.

Sister Mary Josephine happened to go out upon the porch facing the church—the Convent was just on the other side of the street—and stood aghast at the sight of bright, flickering lights in the church tower. Running swiftly to the community room, she exclaimed, breathlessly: “Superior, Sisters! Come and see! The church tower is on fire! !”

The church on fire! ! With a cry of consternation, all the Sisters rushed on to the side porch, and there, sure enough, were moving, flickering lights to be seen at the tower windows.

“I hardly think they are red enough for fire, though,” said Superior, thoughtfully. “Don’t you think they must be reflections from some of the city lights?”

“How could they be, Superior? And then, we should have seen them before! And, besides, look how red they are getting now!” panted the excited Sisters.

Sure enough, the nearest window now seemed brilliantly illuminated by a dancing red light, and one of the Sisters rushed to the telephone to beg Father Quille to come over and judge for himself. In an incredibly short time he had joined them, together with his assistant, and

they were both as much alarmed as the Sisters had been.

"Don't you think some one may have gone up there and turned on the lights?" asked Sister Superior, who was still the most doubtful of them all.

"No, there are no lights in the tower, to begin with, and, besides, the church must be closed at this time," answered Father Quille.

"That white, flickering light to the side there is just such as might be made by sparks from cross wires," put in Father Ross, "and the red light looks as if some of the beams were beginning to blaze."

The more they looked the more they were convinced that the church tower must be ablaze, and one of the Sisters flew to the telephone to call up the fire department.

"Come with me; we must hurry to get out the Blessed Sacrament and put it in a place of safety," cried Father Quille to his assistant, as he fairly ran down the stairs.

"Oh, and after that, couldn't you save some of the statues?" cried Sister Mary Josephine, while Sister Superior and several of the others hastened to the Chapel to pray before the Tabernacle.

The fire station was close by, and, even before the Sisters had phoned, a call had already been turned in by some people who had seen the lights

from the street; so before the Fathers could make their way through the crowd which had already assembled, two fire engines came dashing up and the fire ladder was seen coming in the distance, while bells clanged, and the excitement prevailed.

Springing from their engine, the men of the first hose wagon rushed into the church, just as the people in the street began to exclaim in astonishment that the lights had gone out suddenly. The fact was, the boys had heard the fire-engine bells, and eager to see what was up, they had seized the squabs nearest at hand and prepared to hurry out into the street. When the anxious firemen rushed up the tower stairs, therefore, they met three very much astonished small boys, two of which were carrying three or four good-sized squabs in their arms, while the third lighted them down with one of the lanterns, and swung from his left hand the other two, which had been extinguished.

“What have you been doing, you mischievous young rascals? Where’s the fire? Here, you below, these must be the culprits, seize them,” cried the chief, as, together with a number of his men, he dashed past them, only to find the tower room in darkness and the birds still fluttering about wildly.

“Why, there’s no fire at all! It was just these young rascals’ lanterns,” cried the chief, as half

angry, half laughing, he hurried down again to find Donald and his comrades in tears at having been seized upon by some of the firemen as suspected fire bugs.

"I see, it's all a mistake after all," laughed Father Quille. "It's only some of the choir boys who were after the pigeons," and he apologized to the men for having called them out for nothing.

"It certainly did look uncommonly like a fire," they all admitted. "We saw it the minute we got out of the station and thought we'd only be just in time to save your church."

"That comes of those yer rascals stealing our doves," exclaimed the Sacristan, who had just come back and was only too glad to give information to the dense crowd that had assembled in no time around the building.

"Stealing—then if there hadn't been a fire, there had really been robbers, burglars, house-breakers at work," ran through the assembled throngs, and one of those officious people who are always so eager to meddle with what doesn't concern them hastened to a nearby store and telephoned for the police. They, too, were close at hand, and the next thing Father Quille knew he found himself confronted by two burly policemen dragging towards him the terrified boys and asking him if he wanted to give them in charge.

"Give them in charge? Why, certainly not!"

he exclaimed indignantly. "They were doing no harm. They are three of my choir boys, and now I think of it, about three weeks ago I gave them leave to go up in the tower and take some of our pigeons. Don't be frightened, my lads; no one shall harm you; only another time just let us know when you are going to wave red lanterns about on the premises."

So with a great deal of laughter and joking over the double false alarm that had been given, the crowd dispersed, the Sisters went back to their evening devotion, and the boys went home carrying with them the young pigeons which had been the innocent cause of so much excitement and commotion.

Donald was very successful with his pigeons, and they increased and multiplied so fast that not only did Mr. Harrison have plenty of squab pies, but from time to time Mrs. Harrison made one of her very nicest, which Donald proudly carried to Father Quille or to the Sisters, who found them delicious.

Still the story of the lights in the tower remained one of the jokes of the neighborhood, and especially of the Convent, for a considerable time, and Donald was often teased about it and told that when he started his dovecote, he had felt obliged to call in the whole fire department and police force to inaugurate it.

VII

NEW SCHOOLFELLOWS

OVER a year had passed since last we saw the Harrisons, and though it had been a happy one for the children, it had been a very tryingly anxious one for the parents, for business seemed worse and worse, and in spite of Mrs. Harrison's clever management they had had to retrench, and give up many little comforts and simple pleasures. Poor mother! she often looked pale and weary nowadays, especially since the new baby, Francis, had come to them, and even the children could not but see that she was harrassed and overworked. Still she never complained; on the contrary, she was always the same sweet, loving, smiling mother, equally tender and sympathetic with all the children. Donald did his utmost to help her in every way he could; he was such a mother's boy, every one said. Little Connie also did her best to be useful, but Mary, though she was sweet and affectionate, was anything but anxious to do any work about the house or to help with the little ones. Bright, clever, pretty and taking though she was, Mary was the one

about which her parents felt the most anxiety, on account of her love of self, and love of ease and pleasure which seemed to have grown in her of late, making her so like her *own* mother, her father thought with a sigh.

Another of her failings which considerably troubled them, was her intense sociability and love of conversation, which caused her very often to make friends with many of the least desirable girls at the Convent. When school opened again after the summer holidays that year, there were among the newcomers two girls who were to have not a little influence on Mary's future life. One was Jessie Symonds, a clever, ambitious, rather stuck-up girl, who took a dislike to Mary from the first, chiefly, I fancy, because she found her at the top of her class and was determined to outdo her. The other was Isabel Presscot, a rather pretty and pretentious little miss, whose parents were very well off and who seemed to think she was conferring an immense honor on the Convent by gracing it with her presence, especially as she was not a Catholic. The Sisters had admitted her rather unwillingly, for there was a sly, deceitful expression on her pretty face, her handsome, violet blue eyes never looked you in the face, and her haughty, supercilious manner was almost insulting. Still, her family, though utterly lacking in any religious beliefs.

was highly respectable, and there seemed no adequate reason for refusing a good-paying pupil, so the kind Sisters hoped they might influence her for good, and determined to watch pretty closely to see she did not lead any of her schoolmates into evil.

Isabel from the very first took quite a fancy to Mary, and determined to have her as a chum and confidante, while Jessie lost no time in showing her animosity and dislike. A few days after the opening of school, therefore, Mary was talking to her mother about her new schoolmates, and, of course, mentioned these two.

"I don't like Jessie Symonds at all," she was saying, "and I'm sure she just *hates me*, though I've never done anything to her, you know, mother. She's just horrid mean, and she says such spiteful things to me—but isn't it funny, she comes from Springfield, Mass. Wasn't that where we used to live, mother?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Harrison very unenthusiastically, for the same feeling of dread and heartache that she had had once before seized upon her at the mention of the name. "You were born there, dear, and so were Donald and Connie. I don't remember hearing of those Symonds, but then, Springfield is a large city, and people don't know each other in such places unless they have some business or other connections. The

best way to avoid having quarrels with her, dear, is to speak to her as little as possible, and when you do so, to be careful to be sweet and polite to her. Then if you have the opportunity of doing her any little kindness, don't fail to do it."

"Oh, mother! I don't see why I should be kind to a girl that's so horrid to me. Isabel has noticed it and she says she wouldn't stand it, if she were me. I love Isabel! She's just darling and she says she's taken such a fancy to me. Her people are quite rich and have a dandy limousine, and she comes in it every morning. But I'm so sorry for her, mother, for she's very unhappy. Just fancy! She's got a stepmother and she says she's a horrid vulgar woman and so cruel to her, though she pets her own children like anything."

"I don't think that Isabel can be a very nice little girl or a ladylike one, or she wouldn't speak in such a way of her stepmother, especially to an almost total stranger like yourself," answered Mrs. Harrison.

"Oh, but, mother! I'm her friend, she says, quite her dearest friend already, and she says we must be chums."

"My dear! One can't make *dear* friends in about three days, and I do not wish you to have too much to do with this little girl till I know a little more about her. Is she a Catholic?"

"No-o-o, mother," answered Mary reluctantly,

"but she's ever so dear and so pretty, and so beautifully dressed, and she gives me lots of candy even during study hour."

"What! In school time! That is forbidden, isn't it? I'm afraid this must be a very spoilt, and possibly a disobedient and deceitful little girl!"

"Oh, no, mother; she's anything but spoilt! She says her stepmother never gives her *anything*, hardly enough to eat, and sets her father against her, and Isabel says she just hates her and I don't wonder. She says she hated her the very first day she saw her."

"Then I don't wonder her stepmother does not love her, but she can hardly be as bad as the child makes out. Didn't you say Isabel was beautifully dressed and came in an auto, and had candy to give away? That does not seem much like not having enough to eat. Now, Mary, dear, remember, until I know something more about this Isabel Presscott, I forbid you to have much to do with her. I will take the first opportunity of seeing Sister Superior, for friendships, even little girls' friendships, have too much influence on one's life to be undertaken lightly."

Mary felt aggrieved, and was inclined to be rebellious, but the next day she was too much taken up with Jessie Symonds to think much of Isabel. This was Wednesday and on the fol-

lowing Friday girls of her class were to write a prize composition paper on General Grant, and all the previous year Mary had been head of her class. She knew that Jessie intended to outstrip her and she was determined she should not do so, so as soon as the subject had been given out the little girl thought of nothing but working it up, and even her recreation hours were passed in poring over encyclopedias and other reference books. When she got home she spoke to her mother about it, and Mrs. Harrison, who was a highly educated woman, and who had known some of the Grant family pretty intimately, helped her very much by telling her a number of interesting anecdotes about the General's life, and advising her how to plan and write out her composition. The papers had to be written out in class on Friday, and each girl had prepared a number of notes to be looked over at the last minute. After recess on that eventful morning Sister Theodora, in whose class she now was, announced that she would give a quarter of an hour for looking over the notes, after which she would give the signal for them to begin writing their compositions. When Mary put her hand in her desk to look for hers, she found to her consternation that they were gone. In vain she searched among all her books and papers, there was not a sign of them and yet,

she was sure she had left them there before going out to the playground.

"Mary Harrison," called Sister sharply, "what are you doing there with your head in your desk all the time?"

The little girl looked up, her eyes swimming in tears. "Please, Sister," she said, "I was looking for my composition notes and—they're gone! I'm sure I left them there when I went out for recess,"

"Perhaps you *thought* you did, and you took them out with you carelessly," answered Sister kindly. "Run and see, dear, only be quick about it."

But search as she might, poor Mary couldn't find the notes and finally she went back to her seat with a feeling of despair and anger. *Somebody* must have taken them and now that horrid Jessie Symonds would probably be first in composition! It was maddening, and Mary's tears were falling fast when Sister gave a call to attention, then said sternly:

"Now let all papers, books and things be put back into your desks, and stand up while I bring you round the sheets on which to write your compositions."

As she came up to Mary's desk, she stopped a minute and said encouragingly:

"Don't fret, Mary. I know you've worked the

subject up carefully and you have a splendid memory, so you are sure to do well in spite of your loss, dear."

This comforted Mary a good deal, still it was quite with a feeling of despondency that she was about to start work, when she remembered what mother had told her about that catechism lesson in which she had failed. It was not her fault this time if she was at a disadvantage, and after a heartfelt prayer to Our Lady, her courage returned; she remembered all her mother's helpful suggestions and most of what she had read up, for, as Sister had said, she had a very retentive memory and she was soon so engrossed in her paper that she forgot everything else.

That afternoon after luncheon, Sister Theodora announced she was going to read out the winners' names in the composition, and all the girls held their breath as she very deliberately sat down and took up the papers.

"By far the best, especially in the way of grouping and presenting the subject matter, is the paper by Mary Harrison," she began. "There is another paper that is strangely like hers in the way of matter, in fact, almost identical, except that Mary's contains a number of interesting anecdotes on General Grant's private life which are not to be found in any of our books of refer-

ence. Had you any mention of these in your lost notes, Mary?"

"No, Sister," answered Mary, who was smiling and flushed with happiness. "It was mother who told me all those yesterday evening. She was acquainted with many people of the Grant family, and had heard all those things about him from them."

"I see. You are a lucky girl to have such a mother in a hundred ways, Mary. Well, there is no doubt as to who gets first prize. It is Mary Harrison and I congratulate you all the more heartily for keeping your place at the head of the class, dear, as you were put at an unfair disadvantage by someone who did a mean and despicable action of which Sister Superior has been made acquainted. The next prize is won by Ethel Barnes, the third by Loretta Bailey," and so Sister went on enumerating names without mentioning that of Jessie Symonds who, after all her boasting that she would surely take the first place, was apparently among the number of those whose compositions were said to be too poor to deserve notice.

When school let out, the radiant Mary was standing among a group of her admirers and receiving their congratulations, while she repeated with pride her account of all her mother knew about the Grants.

Just then Jessie Symonds came passing by and, maddened by her anger and mortification, she hissed out to Mary:

"You needn't be so proud about your mother, as you call her, even if she did know the Grants, for she's no mother of yours, nothing but your stepmother!"

"How dare you say that! It isn't true!" cried Mary, vehemently.

"Isn't it, though? I know better. My people knew all about yours in Springfield, and mother says this Mrs. Harrison is nothing but your stepmother, and they've always kept it dark about your real one because she was nothing but a foundling, and they were ashamed of her."

"It isn't true! It's a wicked lie! I'll tell Sister Superior what you said!" screamed poor Mary, bursting into tears.

"There is no need. I heard it all myself, and I'm more shocked than I can say to think that any girl in this school could possibly say such spiteful and untrue things to another," said the Superior, coming forward and taking the poor sobbing Mary in her arms. "I was coming to look for Jessie Symonds with whom I have to have a word. I only wish I had been in time to prevent this outrage. Don't trouble over this, Mary, dear. Come with me and Sister Dominica will give you something to calm you. You other

girls go home, all but Jessie Symonds. You go back to your class room and wait there with Sister Theodora until I come."

Never had kind, gentle Sister Superior spoken so sternly, never had she looked so troubled, and the girls all scattered on their way home with the feeling that something very grave was taking place. What passed between Sister Superior and her new pupil they never knew, but never again was Jessie Symonds seen within the walls of the Convent of the Holy Name.

VIII

THE FRUIT OF THE TREE

A SHORT time later, Mary rushed into the house; her hair disheveled, her eyes swollen with crying, her whole frame quivering as she cried brokenly:

“Mother! mother! say it isn’t true! Say I’m your own girl, mother!”

With a low moan of pain, Mrs. Harrison clasped the trembling, weeping child in her arms, exclaiming:

“O, my Mary, my dearest, do not grieve! You will always find a mother’s love in me, my darling little girl. There’s no one I love more dearly than you, dear.”

“But am I really truly yours, mother?” wailed the child. “Oh! say you are not my stepmother! Say I’m your own girl!”

Mrs. Harrison’s tears were choking her as, covering poor Mary’s face with kisses, she soothed and comforted her, and then finally said: “I took you when you were only three weeks old, my pet, and have loved you as if you were my own ever since. None of my children are dearer

to me than my Mary, dearest, and God and Our Lady who see my heart know that I speak the truth."

But Mary was inconsolable. Never, she thought, could she be happy again, never would life be the same any more, now that she found the mother she had so loved was not her mother after all, but was one of those hateful step-mothers Isabel had been talking to her about. Yet mother had always been so loving, so dear to her, it seemed impossible she should be a step-mother!

Donald came in just then and when he exclaimed at finding them in such grief, Mrs. Harrison thought it best to tell him everything, adding, "but I've had you both ever since you were babies and God is my witness I could not love you more if you were my own, my dear children."

The boy was rather upset at first, then he looked up with a brave smile and said, as he kissed Mrs. Harrison:

"It seems hard to know you are not our very own, mother, but still it needn't make any difference for I'm sure you'll always love us, and as for Mary and me, we ought only to love you all the more for having always been so dear and loving to us, when we weren't really your children."

"What about Connie? Is she really your *very*

own?" asked Mary, with a twinge of bitter jealousy.

"Yes, dear, but I repeat it, she can *never* be dearer to me than you are. So long as I live, you will always find a mother's love and indulgence in my heart, both of you. I am ever so sorry you should have heard of it in this distressing way, my poor Mary. Your father and I had been talking over the matter and we meant to tell you this very evening."

"That girl said," sobbed Mary, "that you were ashamed of my mother, that she was a———a foundling!"

"That is perfectly untrue," answered Mrs. Harrison. "Your mother was a very sweet and charming woman, of very good family. She was an orphan and was brought up in a rather expensive convent, where her education was paid for by a wealthy aunt who died soon after your mother's marriage, leaving her fortune to charities. Now, don't grieve any more, Mary, dearest. As Donald so truly says your knowing this need make no difference in our lives and you will soon get used to the idea and wonder why it distressed you so much at first. Put on your hat, my pet, and we three will go to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament before dinner."

As Mrs. Harrison had said, Mary might have soon got used to the idea and forgotten her grief

over this matter, if it had not been for her unfortunate friendship with Isabel. Her new friend flattered her, pitied her, made her out to be a martyr to her stepmother's unkindness because she had to help a little in the house, and was not allowed to roam about at will. The Sisters had found out Isabel in numerous falsehoods, and were constantly complaining of her insolence and insubordination, and they warned Mrs. Harrison against letting Mary associate with her. Both her father and mother strictly forbade her to continue to do so, but, encouraged by her "chum," Mary told herself that Mrs. Harrison had no right to order her about and watch her as she did, and, although the two girls were kept as much apart as possible at the convent, they arranged all sorts of clandestine meetings together, during which they talked volubly over their supposed wrongs. In order to do this, Mary had to invent quite a network of lies, pretending that she had forgotten her book at school, or that one of the Sisters had given her an errand to do, or some such thing, and hurrying to the end of the Presscots' garden, where, at a given signal, Isabel came down to meet her. The garden was surrounded by a hedge and had a heavy wooden door which was locked, but that didn't trouble them much because Isabel knew where the key was kept and would either let Mary into the

garden or slink out herself into the street, which was an almost deserted one.

Nothing makes one more unhappy than deceit and an uneasy conscience, and Mary, once so gay and sweet-tempered, seemed to be growing irritable and morose. She was sullen with her stepmother, she kept aloof from her daddy, and she quarrelled with her brothers and sisters, even with Donald, who had always been her especial chum. She neglected her bantams, she was lazy over her studies, she was disagreeable with the little ones, the only one she still noticed and petted being the new baby, Francis. Her parents and the kind Sisters could not think what was the matter with the child, and feared she must be sick or else that she had never overcome her sorrow at discovering that she had a stepmother. Poor Mrs. Harrison! She certainly had a hard time now, for Mary resented every remark or advice she gave her and became more and more irritable, disobedient and almost insolent. Many were the bitter tears the poor mother shed at the foot of the Tabernacle and her prayers for her erring little girl were almost continual.

This had been going on for many months and they were beginning to feel as if they'd lost the bright loving Mary of old, when God sent her a

punishment which, for a time at least, made her repent of her ungrateful conduct.

All of a sudden Isabel left off coming to school and after a few days Mary became quite restless and anxious about her. It had been part of the little girls' deceit to make a show of indifference to each other when in school, for they knew the Sisters were very anxious to prevent any intimacy between them, therefore Mary was afraid to ask Sister Theodora why her friend was absent, and Isabel was so far from being popular with the other girls that when she questioned some of them about it, in what she strove to make an indifferent tone, they answered scornfully that they didn't know and didn't care, in fact they wished she'd *never* come back at all—stuck-up thing!"

For the first four days Mary had found no way of escaping notice sufficiently to go to the Presscots, but on the fifth, after coming home with Donald and Connie, she boldly told her mother that Sister Theodora had asked her to go with a message to a woman living quite in another part of the city, and though Mrs. Harrison felt rather astonished at this, the child seemed so positive, she did not like to prevent her doing so. Mary began by starting in the direction she had mentioned, then turning down a side street she made her way to the back of

the garden at the Presscots' house and gave the peculiar sharp whistle which was their signal to each other. She had to repeat it several times, and it was only just as she was preparing to give it up and go home, that she heard a rustling in the hedge and heard Isabel say in a gasping undertone:

"Wait a minute, the door is padlocked, but I'm getting through the hedge," and a few minutes later she emerged on to the street, torn, disheveled, and panting from her exertions. It seemed to Mary that she was very pale, but that might have been simply the result of her struggle with the hedge. As soon as she was free, she fairly threw herself upon Mary, clasped her in her arms, and embraced her vehemently, exclaiming:

"Where *have* you been all this long time? I thought you, too, had given me up! That you didn't care for me! That you were afraid. Oh, you dear, dear thing," and she hugged her again. "I've been so dull, so wretched, so lonely without you."

"But why haven't you been coming to school?" exclaimed Mary, feeling uneasy, she knew not why.

"It's all such bosh! Just because those children are a bit sick, my stepmother has been mew-ing me up here, won't so much as let me go

outside the doors! They'd kill me or put me in prison, perhaps, if they saw me here."

"Put you in prison? But why, Isabel?"

"Oh, because of the others being sick. She makes such a fuss just because it's them. If it had been me, she'd have thought nothing about it. In fact, I believe I've got it already for I feel sick all over, but of course when *I* get it they'll say it's only tonsillitis and because it's those others she says it's diphtheria, and they put us all into quarantine."

"Diphtheria! quarantine!" almost shrieked Mary, shaking herself from Isabel's encircling arms. "Then why didn't you tell me at once? Why did you touch me? *I* don't want to catch it!" and trembling with fright, she rushed away as quickly as her shaking limbs would allow her and hastened home.

"Why, Mary! how quick you have been! Surely you haven't done Sister's errand?" exclaimed Mrs. Harrison.

"No!" stammered Mary. "I remember she told me afterwards I needn't go."

"It's a pity you didn't think of it at first," said her mother, looking anxious and puzzled.

Mary's nerves were overwrought and her temper, never of the best nowadays, burst out as she answered insolently:

"Oh, of course you must always be suspecting

me, always spying what I do! I'm sick of it!"

"Mary," exclaimed Mrs. Harrison in a shocked, hurt voice, "surely you cannot realize what you are saying and whom you are speaking to. I simply said it was a pity you had not thought of it sooner, because just after you had gone, Mr. Walsh came around with his automobile to take you all for a long drive, and I was sorry you had missed the treat. But now, dear, I have to run round to get some meat for supper, so I want you to mind baby until I come home," and so saying, she hurried out while Mary stood dazed and miserable, not knowing what to do, until the baby, of whom she was really fond, began to cry. Running towards the cot she picked him up and began walking up and down with him, kissing and fondling him more than usual in her nervousness. A few months ago she could not have remained an hour without confessing all her wrong-doing to "mother," but now the habit of deceit and mistrust had so grown upon her, that she felt as if nothing should ever persuade her to confide in her again.

While they were at supper Mr. Harrison said sternly: "Mind, none of you children go near the Presscots' house, for I hear they are all down with a bad form of diphtheria, and it is best to shun the very air about the place. You haven't seen the girl for some days, have you, Mary?"

"She hasn't been coming to school," answered the child, without looking up.

"Of course not. They are all in quarantine. When I think of it, it's a good thing for the Sisters she wasn't the first to be down with it. They might have had to shut up the school or at least disinfected it."

Oh, why didn't Mary confess her sin even then? Why did she go to bed that night with that dreadful secret on her conscience? Why? Because, if a little girl allows a habit of deceit to grow upon her, it is the hardest thing in the world to break it, and sorrow and misfortune are sure to come from it. The next day the whole household was in consternation, for the darling baby was sick, sick unto death, and it was all his sister Mary's fault. She realized it all now, now that it was too late and she thought she would die of shame and sorrow. At last, with tears and bitter remorse, she confessed her fault and after all, it was poor mother who was the first to forgive her, even to plead for her with her angry father. Oh! the misery of those next few days! It seemed almost a relief to Mary when she fell sick with the disease herself, so sick that her life was almost despaired of, and that for many days after she was out of danger they had to keep her quiet. When she was allowed to talk, she asked in a trembling voice: "Is darling baby better?"

The poor mother's eyes filled with tears, as she said in a broken voice:

"Yes, dear, our darling baby is *quite* well now, he can never be sick or suffer again. Don't cry so, Mary dear! for oh! we should not mourn for him. He is a little angel in Heaven praying for us all."

"Our darling baby, oh, I killed him! I killed him, mother!" sobbed Mary. "Can you ever, ever forgive me?"

"You sinned, Mary, grievously, both against God and against your father, and the Sisters, and myself. You deceived us cruelly and remember, we are told God hates a liar worse than a thief. But you have been terribly punished by God Himself and we can only hope that you will be a good, honest, truthful little girl in future and remember that when we who have charge of you forbid a thing, it is for your own good. As for our darling baby, it was God's will, dearest, that he should be spared the struggle and sorrows of life. You did not *mean* to hurt him in any way, though by your sin you caused his death, poor little angel. But do not think that even that can make any difference to my love for you. There is nothing on earth so full of forgiveness as a mother's heart and you will always find a true mother in me, my darling."

IX

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

It was a very repentant, gentle, obedient little Mary that rose from her sick bed after her first great sorrow, and many were the good resolutions she took and the promises she made to her parents. She fully meant to keep them *all*, but she was like the rest of us, and after a time the bitterness of her remorse wore away and the fervor of her good resolutions also. Still, Isabel's evil influence had been removed by the rather sudden departure of the Presscots soon after the outbreak of diphtheria, and Mary had been so touched by mother's devotion to her during her sickness, and still more by her generous forgiveness of her having been the cause of their darling baby's death, that for a time at least, she seemed to love and confide in her as of old, before she knew she was only her stepmother. She became her own bright, happy, loving self once more, took up her studies with renewed ardor and found in the cheery companionship of Donald and their group of little Catholic friends, especially the Walshes and Grahams, a thousand

times more pleasure than she had had in the forbidden intercourse with Isabel.

Mrs. Harrison did not know how to thank God enough for this change in the little girl, and did her utmost to help the kind Sisters in training her in such true and solid piety, that she would be able to resist the natural failings of her rather weak and pleasure-loving character. The girl became a Child of Mary, and a very regular and devout one, and she was quite one of the Sisters' star pupils in every way until it was time for her to graduate.

She was now seventeen, a tall, slight, beautiful girl with masses of wavy fair hair, dark blue eyes and a brilliantly clear complexion. Her step was light, her voice sweet, her laughter merry and unaffected, and it was little wonder that many of her brother's friends were already much taken with pretty Mary Harrison. But there was one of them, who had been her devoted admirer ever since he was a little fellow, and that was Philip Walsh, who had grown into a very clever, capable and handsome young man. Even as a child, in spite of his quiet, almost shy manner, there had been a certain dignity about him and this had grown with him. He was at the head of most of the Catholic Young Men's Confraternities, and indefatigable worker for the St. Vincent de Paul and Holy Name Societies,

and yet, at the same time, one of the ablest and most enthusiastic members of the social club, clever at acting, at reciting, at organizing entertainments of all kinds and a great favorite with every one. His father, though not exactly a wealthy man, was in a good position and after receiving a fine education, first at the Sisters, then with the Jesuit Fathers, the young man was now studying to become a pharmacist and was already assistant in one of the best drug stores of the city. It was no wonder, therefore, that the Harrisons were happy and proud of his attentions to Mary.

But after Mary's graduation, poor Mr. Harrison made a great mistake which caused them many sorrows and anxieties. In spite of their straitened means, mother had wished Mary to take a year of post-graduate work in the Commercial Class at the convent, but her father, who had never finally joined the Church, and, therefore, still retained some of his Protestant notions, contended that, splendid as were the nuns in their teaching of most things, they could have no practical knowledge of business methods and finally decided that the girl should take a year's training in a noted business college in town, and should begin by taking their summer course. She must meet all sorts of people in life,

he argued, and was old enough and pious enough to have the courage of her opinions.

The young people she met at the college were not *bad*, but too many of the girls were of the rather fast, vulgar type, and entirely taken up with boys, dress, and so-called pleasures of all kinds. At first all this shocked Mary, she held aloof from them and they laughed at her piety, her quiet ways and love of home. Then little by little she became accustomed to their folly and rather admired it, began to associate with them, join in their talk and foolish pleasures, and blush for her religion, which she concealed and neglected more and more. And along with her faith vanished her sense of duty and peace of mind. Then some of these new friends began to exclaim:

“Oh, you *must* read this novel, Mary it is perfectly *killing*, and you can't be a bit up to date if you don't read the latest thing out,” and Mary began to read the sort of trash they enjoyed, and her morbid insatiable love for sensational literature sprang up worse than ever. She no longer cared for the wholesome books she could get from the convent library, but reveled in the paper-covered novels which she was ashamed of being seen with, and carefully hid when at home. More she read and more vitiated her taste became, so that she now pored with

pleasures over books that she would have thrown down in disgust a few weeks before. At best they were high flown, impossible tales of poor but beautiful girls persecuted by a cruel relative, and finally liberated and raised to opulence and greatness by some lord or millionaire, and Mary's foolish romantic mind was soon filled with day dreams of coming wealth and worldly success. She saw herself queening it in some lordly mansion, receiving the homage and admiration of society, spending countless thousands lavishly and so forth. No wonder that in the midst of these dreams of glory, the daily drudgery of housework, the petty economies of each day, the dull routine of a quiet life seemed all distasteful. Even Philip began to appear very uninteresting, for there was none of the dashing recklessness of the millionaire heroes of her novels about him.

Little by little, she became listless, dissatisfied, irritated once more, she neglected all her duties in order to shut herself up and pore over her exciting tales, she became rebellious and often insolent with her mother, who had once more taken, in her mind, the place of a cruel step-mother oppressing the beautiful girl. Poor mother was deeply distressed and once more threw herself with tears and supplications at the feet of her Eucharistic Lord, while Mr. Har-

rison and Donald were perfectly indignant at Mary's behavior towards her, and Philip was not a little disturbed and grieved at the change in her manner.

So things went on from bad to worse, Mary insisted that she was old enough to choose her own friends and go out where she liked, she was no longer a child and had a right to be independent she declared; and so she went to second-rate theatres and movies and dances with her new friends, and the Sisters noticed sorrowfully that she no longer kept up her obligations as a Child of Mary. Alas! the poison of that bad reading was beginning to eat into her very soul!

One day she came home from commercial college rather later than usual, and flew into a passion because a certain white dress of hers had not been washed and ironed, and she declared that she had nothing else to go out in that evening.

"I'm sorry, Mary, dear," answered her mother gently, "but I have not been well today and I had so much house cleaning to do that I couldn't get round to the washing."

"Why couldn't Connie have done it?" cried Mary angrily, "she often washes her own things!"

"I don't know why poor Connie should be expected to do your washing, Mary," answered mother. "She has no more time than you have,

yet she helps me ever so much in the house, so do your brothers and little Phoebe, while you have given up all home work of late. It is not fair to the others, dear."

"Oh! of course not!" sneered Mary, insolently. "Of course it is *I*, the poor despised step-daughter, who ought to do all the scrubbing and washing and mending of the house, and be the servant of the family. But I've done it long enough. I've had enough of it and I'm not going to stand it any more or put up with . . ."

She was stopped in this harangue which she thought so clever and which she had taken almost word for word from one of her thrillingest and latest "yellow backs" by a stern cry of "Stop that, Mary!" from her father who now stood before her, white with anger. For a minute she flinched, then the two stood looking at each other, she wild and defiant, he stern in his indignation. At last he spoke in a quiet, constrained voice:

"You say you've had enough of this and so have I, my daughter. I am not only grieved, I am ashamed and disgusted at your ingratitude, your insolence, your deceit, and so is your own brother, Donald. I have been wondering at the cause of the deplorable change in you and this morning I explored your room. I no longer wonder. Grey-haired man as I am, I blush to

think that any child of mine should have been reading the trash you have been feasting on. I told you when you were a child that this craving for reading, if not properly guided, and controlled, was one of the most perniciously dangerous things on earth, and its effect on you has proved it. As for your conduct to your loving and devoted mother, of late it has been simply *disgraceful!*"

"She is *not* my mother," stormed Mary tragically.

"She has ever had the heart of a mother towards you. She has saved and pinched and worked herself almost to death to give you an education, and clothing, and many pleasures and luxuries which we could ill afford, and which you were in no way entitled to. By rights, you ought to have been earning your own living and even helping us by this time as your noble-hearted brother, Donald, has been doing for more than a year. If it hadn't been for his help we couldn't have given you this extra year at Commercial and I wish to goodness we hadn't done it."

"Oh, of course, you have been set against me, you are all for the other children. . . ."

"Mary! you know that isn't true. Nobody has set me against you, least of all your mother, if that's what you mean. Your own brother, Donald, did warn me that he knew you were

reading books and frequenting people who were doing you no good."

"It was mean, unkind, cruel of him, it isn't true!" cried Mary, "and my friends are just as good as his any day."

"It doesn't seem like it," answered Mr. Harrison gravely. "In any case, I may now as well tell you, once for all, that I have not the means to support you in idleness and foolish pleasures, and that if you won't do your share in helping in the house as do all our other children, you may go out and work for yourself, as hundreds of other girls have to do."

"I thought so! I was sure it would come to this," shrieked Mary. "That woman has got you to turn your own daughter out of your house to . . ."

"Nonsense, Mary! I am not turning you out of my house. I am simply telling you that if you wish to live in it you must do your share of the work and behave decently. I repeat it, *decently*, to its mistress. I've said it and I mean it. You can think over it."

After this painful scene, Mary rushed up to her room where she began weeping "hysterically" like her favorite heroines, hoping that some one would come to soothe and condole with her, but as nobody seemed to take any notice of this "wild grief," she dried her tears and sat up to

consider the situation. She was quivering with anger, still there was a tinge of pleasurable excitement in the affair. It was so romantic, so like a penny novel to be thus *spurned* from her father's house!

The result of her cogitations was that a few hours later, she went down to her father and told him tragically that she meant to leave "this roof where I've been made to feel I am not wanted," and go to San Francisco to an old cousin, the only relative of her mother's who had ever corresponded with them. She had expected her father to storm and weep and expostulate, but to her surprise he took the matter perfectly cool, saying:

"You are perfectly at liberty to choose for yourself, as I told you just now, Mary. If you really wish to go, I will pay your railway fare, which is quite a small one as the journey is short, and after that, you must shift for yourself for you need expect no pecuniary help from me."

And the very next day Mary left the loving home where she had been so cared for and cherished, and went off to the great city.

It is strange how grand and romantic things can be in cheap novels, and how fearfully uninteresting and even unpleasant they often turn out to be in real life. Because Mary's mother had had one rich aunt, the girl had concluded that

all her relatives must be wealthy, and she expected to drive up to a stately mansion and be received by her cousin's liveried servant in true "dime novel" style. Instead of that, the hack stopped at a dreary looking lodging house in a poor quarter of the town, and a sour-faced elderly woman who proved to be Mrs. Turner herself, opened the door and said coldly:

"Oh, you're the Harrison girl I had a telegram about. Your father says you wish to find work in San Francisco. Well, you'd better have stayed at home. Still, if you want a room I've one I can let you have for five dollars a month, as you're a relative. Board extra, of course," and leading Mary up a dark staircase she opened the door of a stuffy, dingy room, little bigger than a cupboard, as unlike home and as uninviting as anything could be. Mary's heart sank within her, but she comforted herself by thinking that it wouldn't be for long. She would soon get a good situation after which, of course, would come the grand marriage.

The very next day, having got all the information she could from Mrs. Turner, she set out in search of work. But she had no certificates or recommendations, and there were hundreds of girls who had both and snapped up every available position. At last, when nearly reduced to starvation, Mary obtained a situation as sales-

lady in a small department store, which belonged to a friend of Mrs. Turner's. It certainly was fearfully unromantic, but it paid for her bread and butter and room.

X

SORROW TURNED TO JOY

WEEKS and months passed and still Mary had to continue in her uncongenial, ill-paid situation, for the simple reason that she could get no other. She earned barely enough to pay for her most dire necessities, her cousin was harsh and unsympathetic, she made few friends and those only of a humble kind, and her tiny room was dreary in the extreme. Again and again, she was tempted to beg her parents' forgiveness and return to the old home life, which was luxurious compared to her present one, but her pride still kept her back. So to drown her heartache, and home-sickness, and vague feeling of remorse, she spent every minute she could in reading those vile novelettes, pinching on her very food to find money for them. Sometimes, but not always, alas! she had had the courage to go to Mass on Sunday, and at times she still prayed to Our Lady to help and protect her, but it was only by fits and starts that she even thought of it. She never approached the Sacraments now and her heart seemed turned to stone. And still, in spite of all

she had gone through, she didn't meet the millionaire hero!

At last, one day, an elaborately dressed young man with wavy dark hair, "flashing black eyes," a diamond ring, a carnation in his buttonhole, and a half-smoked cigarette between his fingers, came in to buy some collars. True, he only spent a quarter, but Mary felt sure he must be a lord or something grand, for he was just the type of the heroes in her books. He returned several times, and one evening he finally asked her to go with him to the movies. Then, in the course of conversation, he gave her to understand that he was the son of one of the most important personages in the First National Bank, and that his family was possessed of untold wealth. He also explained that the reason why he could not take her out oftener was that his people were so constantly giving great dinner parties and that they couldn't bear him to be away on those occasions. She, on her side, gave a romantic account of a stately western home, from whence her father, a wealthy merchant, had driven her through the jealousy of a cruel step-mother. Both seemed much impressed with the other's story, and for the next week or two Mr. Algernon continued to take Mary out whenever his pressing social functions allowed him to do so, and the silly girl dreamt of the time when he would intro-

duce her to his family as his blushing bride, and she would preside at all these receptions.

One day, to her great surprise, she met Philip in one of the crowded streets of the city and, after giving her news of her home people, he told her that he had come to San Francisco for a few weeks to help a cousin of his who owned one of the best known drug stores of the city. She listened to what he had to say in a condescending way and then gave a high-flown account of her own successful life, broadly hinting that there was a millionaire banker's son dying to marry her. While she was speaking, Philip looked almost with consternation at her tawdry finery, her powdered and—was it deeply flushed (?) face, and her forced, affected manner, so unlike those of the sweet Mary he used to know. He received her information very coldly, almost with a mocking smile, she thought, and she resented it and cut him dead the next time she met him on the street.

A few days later, Mr. Algernon Bliss Worthingham, as he called himself, invited her to come and take a ride with him on the following Monday morning. He would bring two of his father's riding horses around at about nine o'clock, and they could enjoy a canter together until twelve, when he would have to join the family festivities. To tell the truth, Mary had never ridden much

and had no riding suit, but the prospect of several hours' outing with Algernon was too delightful to be resisted, so she accepted effusively, and spent all her week's salary on buying a suitable hat and material with which to make herself a riding suit.

It was Saturday evening when she began it, and then she realized with dismay that the next day was Sunday and that the eventful Monday would be Christmas day! That was why he had spoken of family festivities! How strange! She had been living in such a dream that she had not realized how time was passing, and this was to be her first Christmas away from home—and the Sacraments! Well, she'd *have* to work on Sunday, but, of course, she wouldn't miss Mass on Christmas morning, she'd have plenty of time to go to an early one and be back before Algernon came for her. But she found the riding suit much more difficult to make than she had anticipated, and it was very late, in fact, Christmas morning before she threw herself down, fully dressed, on her hard bed, intending to get up quite early in the morning. When she awoke, however, she found, to her horror, that it was past eight and that she would have barely time to dress, so that she would have to miss Mass or put off her ride! Oh, she couldn't do that! What *would* Algernon think? And she

hadn't even told him she was a Catholic, for she had heard him sneer at some people who were. And besides, she felt sure he meant to propose during this ride. That was how heroes always did in books, so she *must* miss Mass, it was a case of necessity, and she dressed with a beating heart and an uneasy conscience.

At nine, precisely, Algernon was at the door with the horses, and if Mary had known about such things she would have realized that the banker father did not appear to indulge in very fine steeds. But she was blissfully ignorant on the subject, so she mounted rather awkwardly, while glorying in the impression she must be making on all the roomers and neighbors, and they set out on their ride. To her delight she found that they would be passing by the drug store where Philip was, and she triumphed to think how jealous he would be to see her thus riding with a rich banker's son! What if he were not looking, though? She *must* show off and attract attention, so with a boastful shout of "I'll turn the corner first," she set her horse at full gallop.

In point of fact, she had lost control of him and could hardly keep on the saddle, and as his stable mate felt bound to keep up with him, they made such a clatter that people rushed out of their houses expecting to see a runaway.

This was just what Mary wanted, and she was shrieking with laughter, when she realized that the corner they were about to turn was the very one her parish church stood upon. This seemed to unnerve her, and giving an unskillful twitch to the reins, she turned her mount abruptly just as they came to the deep and rather slippery gutter. The poor beast slipped, struggled to retain his footing, then fell heavily on his side, dashing Mary to the ground, while the second horse, before whose very feet they had fallen, stumbled and fell also.

The young man, who was unhurt, was up in a minute, uttering a most inelegant and unaristocratic exclamation as he hurried towards the girl, who lay half-stunned beside the sidewalk, while the two horses scrambled to their feet again and stood meek and quiet as if waiting to be remounted.

"Why in thunder did you attempt to cross that gutter at a gallop, round a corner, too?" growled Algernon, while roughly trying to pull Mary up again. "Here, hurry up, and mount again before we get a crowd around us!"

"Oh, I can't! I can't!" wailed Mary, "I've hurt my knee, I know I have, and oh! look here!" she added, as great drops of blood began to trickle down her face from a bad gash in her forehead.

"It is nothing, a mere scratch, you are mak-

ing a scene over nothing. Confound you! can't you make an effort?" he hissed savagely.

"Here, Mary, let me help you," said a well-known voice in a tone of protection and proprietorship, which struck like balm on poor Mary's troubled heart. "Take your hands off her," added Philip bluntly, "you don't know how to treat a lady."

"What livery stable did you get these 'ere horses from?" inquired one of the bystanders who had taken them by the bridle. "I'll take 'em back for yer while you helps the lady, if you like."

"Oh, they're not livery horses, they belong to his father, the banker," gasped Mary, who had staggered to her feet and was leaning against Philip's protecting shoulder.

"His father, the banker! That's a good 'un. Poor old cove, 'taint many horses as he owns. Why! I've known him for years, he's janitor's help at the First National. His horses! the banker! ha! ha!"

"I'll take them back to the stables myself," muttered the young man, crimsoning. "I'm not wanted here," and he hastily slunk away. Then, as Mary painfully made her way to the drug store with the help of Philip and a stranger from the crowd, she heard a man say:

"I wonder how that chap got leave of absence

from the Florence on a Christmas day? He's one of the waiters there, ain't he?"

"Oh, just one of the under ones, and the help takes it in turn to go out for a few hours. There won't be much doing till twelve," answered the other.

A waiter! and his father a janitor's help! and this was the man for whom she'd slighted Philip, this was the dashing young millionaire who was to give her a life of luxury and pleasure, this heartless, ill-mannered boor. Poor Mary's tears fell fast, more from mortification than pain, as she lay on a couch in the back room of the drug store and a doctor, who happened to be making a purchase, examined her injuries and shook his head as he said gravely:

"I don't think this cut in your head will be much. I'll sew it up so that it may not leave a scar, but I'm afraid that sprain to your knee will be a slow affair. It will be weeks, if not months, before you can stand much or walk without a stick."

"Oh, but I'll *have* to stand, else I'll lose my situation," cried Mary, "and I have no money left," she added with a sob.

"Haven't you a home? parents? friends to look after you?" asked the doctor kindly. "Perhaps I had better send her to the hospital?" he added, turning to Philip.

"Oh, no, doctor, I'm sure there is no need. The young lady has friends, and I will see to everything," answered the young man firmly.

Yes, good, kind Philip, he saw to everything. He phoned for an auto and took her back to her cousin's, and after settling her comfortably, like the good Samaritan that he was, he left a sum of money with Mrs. Turner, promising to come again when the drug store closed, and bidding Mary keep up her courage, try and rest, and not fret over anything.

After he had gone, Mrs. Turner came in and gave Mary a letter which had come for her that morning, saying rather crossly, "that she hoped to goodness the girl wouldn't be laid up long, for *she* had no time to wait on people."

Poor Mary! how wretched she felt, how humbled, how hopeless! Oh! why had she ever left home and come to live in this cruel city? Why had she believed in that vulgar young waiter and made a fool of herself as she felt she had done that morning? She had missed Mass, and wasn't it a judgment upon her that she had fallen, and been injured and humiliated at the very church door? With trembling fingers she opened the letter, a loving Christmas letter from mother, with a crisp bank note of five dollars. Oh! Mary realized with a pang what privations and hard work it must have cost her to save that amount,

and her heart felt like to break with remorse when she thought how little she deserved it. Then she read the letter, so full of love, of anxiety and prayers for her welfare, of affectionate messages from all at home. "And, dearest," the letter ended, "always remember that if you are in trouble, if life isn't what you hoped you could make it, if you are lonely, or want help of any kind, you will always find a loving welcome in your old home and a mother's heart that is ever yearning for you and praying for you."

"Oh, mother, mother! I want you so badly! Oh, if I only could get back to you, mother," Mary sobbed over and over again, as she covered the dear letter with her tears and kisses. The longing was so great that she tried to get up, but fell back, sick and dizzy, with a wretched feeling of helplessness. Once or twice her cousin came up with rather an aggrieved manner to inquire if she needed anything and offer her some food, but the girl was too hurt by her lack of sympathy to accept anything. And as she lay there in hopeless misery for hour after hour, she seemed to see all the folly and ingratitude and sin of the past year. She thought with disgust of the trashy stories she had been allowing to influence her life, she realized how unjust and ungrateful she had been, with a bitter remorse that was worse than her physical pain. Then

she remembered what day it was, and she prayed as she had perhaps never prayed before for help, and mercy, and forgiveness, and it seemed to her that Our Lady was stooping over her to comfort her.

In the middle of the afternoon, as she lay there weary with weeping and sorrowing, she heard steps and voices on the stairs, and her heart beat wildly, for one was the voice of Philip, and the other, oh—could it be? . . . mother! “Oh, mother! I wanted you so badly! Oh, forgive and take me back, mother!” she sobbed, as she clung passionately to Mrs. Harrison, who clasped her in her arms and pressed her to her loving heart as she murmured:

“My own Mary, my darling child, don’t fret, don’t cry! Mother is here to take care of you and then take you home, my dearest. Mother’s love is as great as ever, and once more we’ll forget the past, my Mary, and just look forward to a happy future, please God.”

Nearly a year had passed since Mary’s accident and return home, and a brighter, more energetic, home-loving and pious girl was not to be found anywhere. She had found a good situation as a stenographer through Philip’s father, and she not only insisted on giving the greater part of her earnings towards household expenses, but in her free hours she helped with a will in

all the work there was to do. Several times a week she managed to go to early Mass and Communion, and she was not only an attentive and devoted daughter, but the most loving and sympathetic sister. Connie was bubbling over with delight, for she was just engaged to Eugene, and Mary truly rejoiced in her sister's happiness, though in private she shed many bitter tears, not of jealousy, but of regret for having, as she thought, forfeited forever the love of Philip. He was very kind to her during his constant visits to their house, but kind in a protective, brotherly way, very much like Donald's, and poor Mary, who felt she had deserved to lose him, prayed ceaselessly that she might bear her disappointment bravely and hide the wound in her heart from those whose love she now fully appreciated. She offered up this cross in penance for her past misdeeds and also for her father's final conversion to the faith, and to the intense joy of the whole family that grace was finally granted them.

On the very day of his reception into the Church, as they were walking home after the ceremony with hearts full of joy and thanksgiving, Philip joined them and after a while proposed that he and Mary should go round to his parents' house to gather some roses with which to decorate the table for the dinner to which he had been invited.

When they came back, both laden with blossoms, Mary's face was radiant with happiness, and tossing down her flowers she flung herself into Mrs. Harrison's arms, exclaiming: "Oh, mother! God is so good to me! I don't know how to thank Him! I am so happy, so happy! for in spite of everything my Philip says he never loved and never will love any one but me, and he has asked me to become his wife!"

"Oh, dearest!" murmured Mrs. Harrison, "our Blessed Lady has now granted both my most earnest prayers."

And words cannot tell the joy and thankfulness that were in that true mother's heart.

THE END

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